

John Sampson
"Imaginative Giving"
Text: Matthew 25:14 - 30
Preached at KVCC
November 19, 2017

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

AMEN.

This morning, as we enter a season of giving and thanksgiving, our church kicks off its Stewardship campaign for 2018.

During the upcoming week you should receive a letter from the church outlining our Stewardship drive. It will be asking each one of us to consider supporting this congregation, and all of the transformative work we do throughout the year. As many of you know our financial health is up to us. Unlike other Christian traditions where the denomination underwrites the

local church, in the United Church of Christ each church is responsible for its own funding. The good news is that over the years our members and friends have been extremely generous, and we continue to be a financially healthy congregation. But to keep our church healthy and vibrant for our children, and their children, will rely on our ongoing generosity today. I hope you will join me and prayerfully consider how you may be able to support this wonderful congregation over the next year.

But I think I may have put the cart before the horse.

Introduced this way Stewardship might seem fundamentally like a financial transaction. But I think that healthy giving is actually not the cause, but the effect. I don't think that church comes about just by financial generosity, but rather that a healthy church, and the experiences we have connected to a

vibrant and spirit filled community, lead people to want to give, lead people to believe in a church and want its service to the world to expand so that others may be deeply nourished and transformed just as we have been. In a church where the spirit is palpable, in a church like this one, members and friends don't just give of their financial resources, but also of their time through volunteering and outreach.

So at the beginning of this Stewardship season, I don't want you to start by thinking of money. That can come later.

Instead, I want you to think about a time you have been deeply touched in some way by this church. Think about an experience you have had in this sanctuary, or in the Van SantVoord Room, or out on the front lawn. Or maybe think of an experience you didn't even have here in this building or on this property, but of a wonderful time you had with a great friend you met through this church. Let this memory be of a

moment of love or transfiguration. Let this memory be of something that happened within the last year, or maybe 25 years ago.

[Wait a minute]

Do you have a memory you'd like to share? Are you up for some old time testimony? Maybe 2 or 3 of us could stand and briefly share a moment we've had within this community that has kept us coming back, has made us invite others to come to this church.

I can start us off.

My memory of being deeply touched in worship was last Pentecost. I am not sure if you were here, and if you remember the moment that touched me. But when I read the scripture,

which was about the first followers of Jesus being touched by the spirit, and little tongues of fire appearing above their heads, and Peter telling the neighbors that the disciples actually weren't drunk because it was only 9 in the morning, I was standing down in the middle of the church and you were all in a circle around me, holding your own lighted candles, and for a minute the time between those first disciples and this congregation seemed to blur, and the experience described in the passage from the Book of Acts, seemed to be our own experience in the here and now. It was a moment for me that didn't touch me in my intellect; it touched me here in my heart. It was a moment when an ancient story came alive for me in a way it never had before. It's an experience I wish could be shared with so many other people.

How about you? Does anyone have an experience they would like to share?

[Let a couple of people share.]

These stories reveal to us a deep love. A love that brings together God's spirit and the ordinariness of our lives, and in the process we are touched and transformed. And these deep experiences are hopefully the things that keep us coming back to this place and these people. These are the experiences that nourish us and give us life, and help us see our path through a world gone dark.

Will you share what you have learned and lived here with others, with those you know, and those who you will never meet?

This is the question of Stewardship.

Are the tears you have cried in these pews of such value that you want others to cry them too?

Is the laughter, and the secret jokes, you've shared while ushering of such worth that you want to preserve this church so others can stifle their laughter in the middle of our prayers just like you did?

And as I say this you know who you are!

Is the moment when the lights are dimmed on Christmas Eve and we are all standing around the sanctuary holding our lit candles as the first words of Silent Night are sung of such beauty that you wish everyone could be bathed in that glow, even strangers?

Are the discussions we have here in our Mission and Social Action group about where we will give our support to local organizations in the next year exactly the light that you believe needs to be shined out in a world grown cold and selfish?

Is the possibility of reaching out to a trans child and letting them know that God loves them according to the truth of how they experience their gender, and that there is a faith community that welcomes them with open arms, a community you believe is worth keeping and nurturing and growing?

If you answered yes to any or all of these questions, then Stewardship asks you one more question.

What will you do to make sure that this church, that Keene Valley Congregational Church, is here to make a difference in

our world, and in the next generation, for those we love and know, and for those we will never meet?

There are many answers to this question. There are as many answers as there are people in this room, and people here in spirit.

And so as we kick-off our Stewardship campaign I ask you to start by putting the horse before the cart and reflect on all of the blessing and hope this community has meant to you in your life. And only then respond to the church's request for your support.

AMEN.