

“Stewardship”

2 Corinthians 9:6-15; Deuteronomy 8:11-18;
Matthew 6:1-4, 19-20

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I suppose if you’ve ever had somebody come to your home or if you’ve gone to stay at somebody else’s home, they may have said, “Make yourself at home.” It’s one of the ways we hope that we can show some hospitality. We like to invite people to make themselves at home.

In some ways, it feels like God has done that as well. If the earth is the Lord’s, and all that is in it, the world and all the people that live in it, there is a way in which God has invited us to make it our home. Perhaps we’ve done that—to live within the creation in our particular location amongst our family and friends, the context of our lives. Sometimes it feels a little bit to me like we’ve so decided that we’re at home, perhaps beyond what I would usually do if I went to somebody’s house and they said, “Make yourself at home.” When I visit someone’s home, I’m not sure I would do quite the exact same thing I would really do at home. But there’s a way in this world God has given us to live in, that I sometimes feel like I’ve made myself so at home that God is no longer part of the picture. Sometimes I begin to think it’s a little like I’ve drawn myself into being, and creation along with me.

Sometimes it feels like we live in a world that thinks we have done it all on our own. A world that thinks you can really draw yourself into reality. Yet it feels to me like when I take a step back, I begin to recognize that I exist and that I had nothing to do with enabling my own existence. I live in an ecosystem that I didn’t have anything to do with making. I didn’t shape the way plants grow. I didn’t make the community I live in. It reminds me of how much there is that I get to participate in or take advantage of, how much the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it; the world and the people in it. I get to be one of those. I get to be in these systems and in these communities. And I certainly didn’t do it on my own.

That doesn’t mean that there’s no effort to be made on my part. That passage from Deuteronomy is this moment when the people are at the brink of going into the Promised Land, and they are told, “You are going to do well. As you do well, remember who got you here. Not only that, but also who gave you the ability to do well.” It’s translated “the power to become wealthy,” which I think is an unfortunate translation. But maybe it says something about how we view wealth. When we’ve lived worthily, we should be wealthy. We tend to put those together, but the Hebrew word really means “to live worthily,” and God has given us that ability or power.

It’s a story of how God has created and given us a place to live, has invited us to make it our home, and has even given us the ability to live well and to live worthily. So, that means that we have some effort to make. I was reminded this week of one of the parables about the ten bridesmaids who are supposed to line the entrance with their lights as the bridegroom comes in. As it turns out, the bridegroom was delayed, and

five of the bridesmaids remembered to bring extra oil and five of them forgot, or didn't think ahead, or didn't make that extra effort. There's a lot of ways you could think about this, but one of the things it reminds us of is that it takes effort. We have to think ahead. We have to think about what we're doing. We have to put the effort out to make sure our candles are lit, our lives are shining.

It's not something that we're unfamiliar with, that we have to take care of things. Most of us realize that if we don't do any maintenance on our car, it's not going to last. If we don't do any maintenance on our homes or our buildings, they're not going to hold up. If we don't do any kind of stewardship on things in our lives—the maintenance, the activity, the effort—there will be problems. Relationships are that way, too. If we don't make an effort in our relationships, oftentimes we don't have relationships that are good. They show that we haven't made the effort. God gives us the opportunity, the ability, to live well and we're invited, then, to make the effort to do so.

Not only that, God is willing to guide us, to give us some direction, to show us the way, to call us into particular ways of doing things. We each have some kind of call on our lives. There are things we are good at that we can share. Ways we can do God's work. It reminds me of the parable of the two sons, where the father asks the two sons to go out in the field and help with the fieldwork that needed to be done. Maybe it was harvesting or planting. One son said, "Sure, I'll go," but he never went. The other son said, "No, I'm not going to go," but then went and did the father's will. I think the suggestion is that God really would appreciate the action more than the lip service; more that we put our lives into what we need to do rather than just say we do it.

Really, isn't that what stewardship is all about? It's remembering that God has given freely to us a place to be, a creation, a life. Not only has God given us the opportunity to be alive and to share our lives, but God realizes that when we struggle God comes to invite us again to overcome those struggles. Not only does God invite us to freely give – cheerfully give as it talks about in Corinthians – but to recognize that God has given to us. It is simply an invitation to share in God's giving that we are called to—to be those who continue the very ministry that God has given to us through Jesus, to care for his world, to show grace, to encourage each other, to gather together, to be a people who show the nature of God through who we are and what we do.

So we will come around the table because God has gifted us with this opportunity to remember that we are God's children, sisters and brothers. He gives us the opportunity to come around the table and know that God not only forgives us for the struggles we have, but guides us and sustains us. God invites us to participate in that same work in sustaining our community and our church, doing the good work of God in the world through the lives we lead and the gifts we give.

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it; the world and all that live in it. And we get to be integral actors in God's creation. Amen.