

Stewardship: Power and Possibility

October 8, 2020

There's a game out there that is fun to play. You hand the person next to you a dollar bill and it goes around the circle with the goal of earning a "dollar" each time you get the bill. Very quickly we learn that the faster we pass the dollar bill, the more money we earn, the more likely we "win the game". The real joy of this game is to discover that the choice to give and get the dollar bill as quickly as possible is the best for everyone around the table. No, this is not a political statement. It simply means that wealth/abundance multiplies when we give it away, as a choice to follow God. Think about the story of the rich ruler in Luke 18:18-23.

¹⁸ A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁹ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"

²¹ "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.

²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²³ When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy.

The story of the rich young ruler shows us that faith and finances are intimately connected, giving and receiving are intimately connected, and power and possibility are intimately connected. There is power in having, but the real gift comes in the possibility of giving.

For most of us in the church (and hopefully with our lives), we desire to use our gifts and strengths to better those around us, sharing God's love. Sometimes that is crocheting or sewing a beautiful throw or mask, for others it is cooking a BBQ or teaching a class. We give in faith, professing by our lives that God will provide, so that others may receive, this is standard nomenclature within the church.

Getting real with our finances means that we explore this power and possibility together. For instance, debt is disempowering and something many Americans wrestle with. Debt is the giving of power over to someone who has control of our future by way of money. This coming year, SOPC hopes to be engaged in a "get real with money" course on how to deal with debt and the reality of burdens it places on our lives. Once we have a grasp on our money, then we can begin to imagine the possibilities of what we can do (gifts) in our world. There is freedom in deciding once we have the power of possibility in our hands.

To put this another way, Martin Luther says that freedom and responsibility are connected. We are free in the sense that we are subject to none but our God (including money). But we have a responsibility in that we are subject to all as servants. Money is just one way we are both subject to none and subject to all. Yet another way to consider this power and possibility concept comes from the popular movie, Spider-Man, where Spider-Man is reminded that "With Power comes great responsibility".

This season of stewardship we are being asked to explore what things we steward, realizing very quickly that these two dichotomies of power and possibility must be held in tension. For instance, no one is going to make you use your gifts in order to bless someone else. We are subject to none other than our God. BUT, we are also subject to all in our Christian walks, it's a daily choice to give. By doing this, we receive the side effects of joy, peace, and some level of financial "security" (I will rename that the power of possibility). Together we are called to (re)-learn that we are called to be subject to all and none simultaneously. It is also with others on this walk of faith that we continuously re-learn that God is the provider of all.

I'd like for you to consider for a moment what ways you desire to use your gifts at SOPC and in the world. What ways are you willing to give away and trust that God will provide what you need? A simple illustration of this was a time when I met a young homeless man on the street when I, myself, was a young teenager pinching pennies. I gave this man a full meal from the closest diner around. I didn't have the money, but I offered him his choice of eats anyway. Was this irresponsible? Perhaps by our world's terms, yes. But my 20 dollars came back to me the next week in a refund check from the place that I worked. This is how God provides, in unexpected and miraculous ways. We only need to be good stewards of what is given at any moment in time. What do you steward and value so much that your life reflects this gift? I hope our God is high up on that list, for through Christ, God gave all so that we may truly, freely live the possibility of a full and gracious life.