

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole CA
The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost October 11, 2020

“God will guide, and provide”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning everyone and welcome to our stewardship kickoff Sunday. I know the stewardship season is usually filled with potlucks and planning meetings, however, I promise you an amazing stewardship season, a campaign worth putting your time, talent and finances into, just in a different way than we have in the past. I also promise you that before this year is done, our vestry will provide you with the new and innovative ways Christ the Lord will be moving forward, along with a narrative budget to explain where we are and where we want to go. With that being said, let us look at what our Gospel and readings have to say about stewardship today.

Our Gospel is kind of an ugly story. The king prepares an amazing feast for a banquet and people refuse to attend, come up with excuses, and even when those off the streets are invited to come in, it appears they take what they want and apparently some do not even have the respect to dress appropriately for the occasion. This kind of scripture would simply make my mother say, “this is why we cannot have nice things.”

Let us really look, not at the particulars of this Gospel, but at the bigger picture it represents.

We are here, gathered together, part of God's family. Scripture tells us we are all created in the image of God. Once we realize that a life resembling the love and generosity of Jesus is our calling, we become the adopted children of God. We are God's family. We are the people God invites to the banquet. We are both the celebrated and the celebrator of God's immeasurable love and generosity. I know it may, at times, not feel that way, but in reality, even through the tough times God invites us into prayer and meditation to fortify ourselves and realize the beauty that is free for us to partake in. He continually calls us into community for support. Do we act like those in today's Gospel and turn away?

Our stewardship season, which includes Thanksgiving, is our opportunity to be aware of those things we take for granted; take a moment to walk in the other person's shoes; be thankful for another day. It is a time to take stock and see if we have progressed on our journey as people of God, as followers of Jesus. Matthew makes it clear: many are called, but few are chosen.

At first read, you think this line is talking about God calling and God choosing, but I beg to differ. Scripture tells us we are all created in the image of God, we are all called to be the best human being we can be and to work at creating a sustainable life for all of God's creatures, big and small. So out of our own design, as represented in Genesis, we are called.

But is it God who really chooses? Do we consider ourselves to be chosen because we come to church? Are we special? Privileged? Well, many Christians would like to believe so, but they are wrong.

We do the choosing. Us, with the free will God gave us. We can choose to participate in God's plan of allowing ourselves to grow into the perfect love of Jesus. Or we can ignore our calling and go with the crowd and whatever the new fad is. Because the way of Jesus is not a fad. No matter what the political climate, whatever country you live in, whatever your culture or race or gender, "love thy neighbor" and "love God" will never change.

Feed the hungry, you have fed Jesus. Visit the sick, and you have visited Jesus. Clothe the naked; take care of the children, the elderly and the widow, all as if they were Jesus. All of these are things we as followers of Jesus are called to do. We can choose to do these things or not.

We are gathered here today as part of the calling. The calling to be a family, a community to better carry out the way of Jesus in a very fragile world. To love God, neighbor and self in a way that promotes thriving over surviving. To acknowledge we go by the grace of God alone, and in a moment it can all be gone.

Once we make the choice, once we chose to be part of God's plan, we come into an ancient covenant between Creator and Created.

*Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.*

Thus we take on the rules of our relationship with God and each other to ensure God is with us and can be experienced by all we interact with.

*If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your
food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your
light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.
The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs.
You shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets
to live in.*

This folks, is our calling. To live this way becomes our choice, and when we do this it is our covenant. Many are called into this, but few actually chose to live so. We praise and have gratitude, we share and take care of each other, and we become blessed, even through the tough times.

*If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own
interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the
holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your
own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs;
then you shall take delight in the LORD,
and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*

These are the rules and our little church, CTL, has chosen to follow our calling to be a light to the world, to see the image of God in each and every person, and to help those we can, while taking our worship and Sabbath seriously. Maybe each of us individually can't accomplish much, but together we can do more.

Throughout our stewardship season you will hear about the various ministries and ways CTL goes about answering the call to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to the here and now. How we as a community honor our baptismal vows. To continue to show people that God has indeed invited them to a banquet, all are welcome, all they need do is turn toward His direction. Suit up and show up.

You may think that our church is aging. It is, but that does not mean that it will not continue. If we allow God to guide, He will provide, and I will not put God's scope of practice in a box. We may become something over the next few years that has not been represented before. We may not even know what is to come, but I want to be part of that legacy - part of the CTL cornerstone.

I want my name in the book of life. I want to invite everyone into that story. I want you to join me with your time, talent, and finances to create a CTL book of life. Let's join God, let Him guide us, and let us trust that He will provide for us as He has before. Let us open our lives to change and newness, not with foreboding, but instead with curiosity and hope. Now is the time to consider how YOU are going to contribute. What are you going to choose?

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

AMEN