

Learning to Give with Passion
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2 Peter 3:18

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

1 Peter 4:7-11

7 The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. ⁸Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹Be hospitable to one another without complaining. ¹⁰Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. ¹¹Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Welcome to Reformation Sunday AND Stewardship Sunday! I am so glad to be here with you this morning.



These last few weeks I have been thinking about how we learn to be good stewards of all God's gifts, how we were taught to give and to share with others...

When I was a little girl and allowed to sit in church, I sat in the balcony with the choir behind the congregation. Every time the offering was about to be taken, Dad would reach in his pocket and pull out a handful of change. From that he would select the shiniest dime or nickel and he would place it in my hand. I knew it was to go in the offering plate when it was passed down the row. And most Sunday's that was not a problem. But every once in a while.... It was a bit harder to let that shiny coin plop into the offering plate. It was hard to let go of the sweet tarts or fireball that coin represented. Yet every week, that coin dropped into the plate and I watched it drift down the row to do its work for God.

Learning to give, learning how to respond to God's love for us and practicing those skills week after week, being faithful is not easy! It is hard to grow and develop new practices, new patterns of life. Loving God, following the path of faith, learning to love Jesus as we are loved, can be hard work. Some days we are filled with joy and certainty. Other days we are slower to respond, our voices are

not tuned well, our hands are tired and our feet hurt, yet we are called to persevere, to continue to practice faithfulness.

This morning we read from First and Second Peter... traditionally attributed to the Disciple Peter. But most modern scholars dispute this authorship due to the language used and the knowledge of events that occurred soon after Peter's death. However, it was not unusual in that time to ghost write letters in the name of important and famous people in order to give the contents of the writing some standing, some context or background.

First Peter was written to encourage those who wondered why Jesus had not already come back as he promised. The writer explains that God's timing is not ours and encourages the believer to be faithful until it is God's time. While Second Peter was written to give courage to those Christians suffering persecution for their faith. In it the writer warns against false teachers who engage in immoral conduct.

Both our passages this morning come from the final section of the letters, where the writer blesses the reader and reminds them one more time to focus on Jesus Christ.

⁷The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. ⁸Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹Be hospitable to one another without complaining. ¹⁰Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. ¹¹Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

So, lets look at the passage from 1 Peter 4:7-11.

Remember it is written as a benediction, a final instruction and a blessing to close a letter concerning why Jesus had not yet returned as he had promised. These were folks who were staring into the offering plate with their lives in their hands, trying to decide if they should give it all for another week, or whether they should relax a bit and give some of their resources to other concerns. Here the writer has the final answer... be serious and discipline yourselves.... Be good stewards.... Serve with whatever gifts you have been given.

In other words... go ahead, give it all. Whatever has been given to you by God... well... give that. Tricky idea right? Because we know that everything we have has been given to us by God... our gifts and talents, our ability to work and serve, our families, our friends... even the home we live in and the food on our tables comes as a blessing from God. Yes, we work hard to make sure we have homes, food and clothing, but God is the one who gave us what we needed to develop into the people we are, to be responsible business people, service workers, healers, teachers, and employees. So... everything we have came from God and ultimately belongs to God right?

But does that mean we need to give it all back? In the earliest Christian communities, they did... after all Jesus said he was coming back soon. They were thinking he would return any day! So what

did they have to lose? They sold their homes and gave the proceeds to the community of faith to distribute to the poor, widowed and needy among them.

But Jesus did not return in a matter of months. For the people addressed in 1st Peter, the shift to a longer view was vitally important.

Listen to what is said to them again:

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So...

The end of all things is near... Jesus is still coming back. That has not changed.

Maintain constant love, be hospitable: Hospitality was one of the highest values in the larger society and had been a signature feature of the Jewish faith from the beginning. This is not a change. Hospitality to one another and of course to the stranger, widowed, poor and foreigner in your midst. They completely understood what that meant.

But then the writer goes on....

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OK... they could do that... but what were the gifts they had been given? The word for gifts here is charisma -- meaning Gift of Grace... in other words a gift you have that only comes from God. We know them as spiritual gifts. You may recall the lists in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, Ephesians 4:7-13, Isaiah 11:2-3, and Romans 12:3-8 among others. The list in 1 Corinthians 12:28 says...

And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.

1 Corinthians 12:28

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The author presents two gifts in particular... speaking and serving... But the writer doesn't just say use your gifts and leave it at that... the writer is asking for more, much more... don't just use your gifts, but lean into them, put your whole heart in them, go as far as you can go, use them as if your life depends on it... because in some ways it does.

¹¹Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ.

Listen to these words and see if you can hear the urgency, the push to go beyond, the call to put your whole life into it...

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Did you hear it? Can you imagine it?

I would like to show you a video clip from an older movie to explain what this might look like... It is from "Sister Act." The main character is Delores, a Las Vegas lounge singer placed in a convent by witness protection. She is invited to join the choir which is in terrible disarray. Watch how Delores works with the choir and what happens with Sister Mary Roberts.



Hummm... I love that.... Sister Mary Roberts was giving to the choir what she assumes she had... a little voice, but one that sang on pitch. But Delores ask her for more... Sister Mary Roberts had it in her all the time... a gift of grace. Who knew that big, beautiful voice was locked inside that small shy Nun!



So, today, Sister Mary Roberts... I want you to be honest about the gifts you have been given, regardless of whether or not you are or have been using them for the work of God. I want you to imagine that you hold those gifts gently in your hands. They may or may not be on a list of spiritual gifts in scripture... they may be more like this... the ability to follow instructions well, the ability to cook food folks actually want to eat, it may be the ability to talk to anyone, anywhere, anyhow or the ability to squeeze a nickel so hard it becomes a quarter. It could be the ability to hold someone's hand and pray so that their heart becomes whole. Whatever it is... hold it in your hands, thank God for it and then... with courage and passion give it to God in service to God's church, to bring Glory to God's holy name.



You can do this. Don't hold back. Joyfully place your shiniest gifts into the offering plate, into God's hands and then watch as those gifts expand, as the note you sing makes its way out into the noisy world with the gifts of those around you and it becomes beautiful, glorious music for the Loving Lord, our God. Amen.