

I am sorry that I cannot be with you this evening because I really enjoy sharing my passion for stewardship. Unfortunately, my personal schedule does not allow me to be with you. Hopefully this message will convey the high points. Kevin, Peggy and Joel can answer questions about execution of the fall stewardship campaign and Consecration Sunday.

Some would make the case that leaders need to be leaders and perhaps be held to a higher standard than others. I believe that when it comes to being good stewards of the gifts God has given to us we are all held to the same standard. So my message to you is the same as my message to myself, to staff, and to the congregation. There are three key points I'd like to discuss. These three concepts are potential, abundance, and trust.

POTENTIAL:

The average ELCA Lutheran gives 1.6% of their income to church. Some might berate us for such a low level of giving, but I want to focus on potential. If 100% of our income is the maximum we could give back to God, then we have tremendous potential to do better. We have ample opportunity to demonstrate greater gratitude to God for all he has done for us.

Mormons give on average 7.7% of their income, so they have less potential for improvement than Lutherans, but they are an example of a goal we might shoot for. I would note that they face the same economic challenges we face and are able to live comfortable lives without 7.7% of their income. Giving averages are just that, averages. Some give more and some give less, but all have the potential to do better including me and you.

ABUNDANCE:

This past summer Pastor Ruth Anne preached an insightful sermon about the feeding of the five thousand. In the gospel of John, Jesus asked the disciple Phillip, "How are going to feed these people?" Jesus knew how, but he wanted Phillip to think it through. What Phillip saw was scarcity... a few loaves and a couple of fish. Jesus used the occasion to teach the myth of scarcity and the reality of abundance. The media today are full of references to economic crisis and the fears that accompany it. When we, like Phillip, look at the situation we are tempted to see scarcity and look right past abundance. The lesson from scripture is clear; God has given us abundance even in what the media describes as scarcity. We have to decide if our stewardship response is born of scarcity or abundance.

TRUST:

I need your help illustrating this third point. Reach into you wallets or purses and pull out a bill, any bill. If you turn the bill over to what I would call the back side, you will see a four word phrase...In God We Trust. My question to you is, do we? Help me illustrate what we teach and confess about stewardship, by repeating after me

1. This is God's gift to me
2. This is not my money.
3. I don't need this money.
4. God will provide.

Now I'd like to give you a chance to practice trust. Don't put the bill back in your wallet or purse. Put it in the offering plate along with your regular offering. I promise you that there will be no negative consequences of giving this extra cash back to God. You will not go hungry; you will have clothes to wear and a roof over your head.

So, as you go home to discuss, pray, and think seriously about your pledge to Bethany for the coming year, think of these three things, **Potential, Abundance, and Trust**. I pray that you will allow God to guide you and motivate you in this important decision.

Ron Bruggeman