

“Priorities”

October 12, 2025
Stewardship Sunday

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He said to his disciples, Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, you of little faith! And do not keep seeking what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that seek all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

Luke 12:22-31

May the words of my mouth
And the meditations of all of our hearts
Be acceptable in thy sight
O God, our Rock and our Redeemer.
Amen

“Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.”
Or in Matthew’s version from the more poetic King James: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Both gospels begin with a qualifier: “Instead.” “But.”

Jesus presents his teaching as an alternative to something—to business as usual. And what is business as usual? Worrying about things you can't control—vain strivings. “And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?” Jesus asks. “If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest?” To follow Jesus means to seek something higher, something paradoxically we can do something about—something purposeful, productive, generative. “For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.”

Indeed, Jesus calls us to reach for the highest ideals—to strive for the Kingdom of God—to strive for righteousness—but in doing so he underscores that we actually HAVE agency in Jesus Christ. Do this—“hitch your wagon to a star,” as Ralph Waldo Emerson put it—do this and you will find that everything that is necessary is provided. Do this—act on behalf of justice!—and you will get what you need to endure.

This is a theme we've seen before in the Gospel. Those who assert themselves are healed. Dishonest stewards who dare provide for their futures are commended. The righteous are likened to a widow who pesters an unjust judge until he finally gives her justice just to shut her up. ASK until you receive. KNOCK until the door is opened unto you. ACT!

We have a choice in this life concerning what kind of world we're going to live in: A world of vain worry and care—or a world of trust and providence—a conceptual world of scarcity—or a conceptual world of abundance—a world of alienation—or hope. The point to be made is that we have a say in the matter—not that we control everything—we don't—but that we can in fact, make a difference, we can shape our environments. Yes, we are called to choose a better life and a better world—but more to the point, we are given the means, the power, through the Holy Spirit—to make that choice. In Jesus Christ we are made a new creation complete with new possibilities.

Indeed, St. Augustine defined sin as a paralysis of the will—it is to be trapped in a state of sin—to be trapped in a sinful system—an unjust system—paralyzed and doomed to live in a hopeless world—where only the privileged receive justice—or only the wealthy can afford to live with dignity—trapped like in one of those nightmares where you can't move—your body turned to stone.

Salvation, liberation, deliverance...whatever else these things might mean, they also mean the power to hope—and in hoping, the power to transform our worlds and our lives—because hope, in and of itself, is power—agency—the freedom to act.

Again, Jesus presents his teaching as an alternative. We can choose to be lonely in our worry—wringing our hands in fear for the future—or we can choose to be part of the Body of Christ—instruments of the divine plan—we can choose to strive for the Kingdom of God in the company of the saints.

Friends, today is Stewardship Sunday, a time to set priorities—a time to choose. In calling us to seek first the Kingdom of God, Jesus is calling us to renounce the world that the one Jesus called “the ruler of this world” is struggling mightily to bring into being—a nightmare world of authoritarianism, a police state, a world of fear, and hatred, and ignorance—a world where evil thrives. But this world is not the world that God has promised—not the world that God has called you and me, like midwives, to help be born—a world of justice, where EVERYONE has enough to eat and EVERYONE has a seat at the table.

Let that sink in. Take a moment. Take a deep breath—and let your body dream. Linger for a moment in the light of the Kingdom. Close your eyes and dream up a world where there are no unhoused, where everyone has access to shelter, access to mental health care, access to clean food and water, warm clothing for the Pennsylvania winter—a place to go to the bathroom with dignity and privacy. Dream up a world where no one is stopped and taken into custody for the crime of speaking Spanish or having dark skin. Allow yourself to imagine a world where women make equal pay and decisions about their own bodies, and no one is discriminated against for who they love, no one is beaten up for living the gender they feel. Imagine an America striving to live up to its own ideals of equality! Let us dream up this world—let us CHOOSE it! FIGHT for it!

Friends, go ahead and open your eyes, if you haven’t already. Let us look at the world with eyes wide open. We are not promised that we will live to see the fulfillment of the dream—but we ARE promised the agency, the power to choose to push our world toward that fulfillment of the Kingdom of God—toward the fulfillment of the Beloved Community—to plant the seeds of the future now. And we have the means to live out that promise right now right here—in THIS church.

THIS church where your hearts are liberated by the Word of God, inspired by music, and art—where your hearts are set aflame with cries for justice, your hearts melted by God’s love, God’s acceptance, God’s tender care. THIS church where the hungry and unhoused are fed, where refugees are given succor, where the saints are equipped to fulfill each of their individual and corporate vocations. THIS church where your babies have been baptized, your loved ones memorialized, your marriages sanctified, your minds educated. THIS church made up of sinners, lovers, dreamers, screw ups and saints—THIS church made up of ordinary people who have been empowered to do extraordinary things.

Friends, next week you will receive in the mail a stewardship letter and a pledge card from THIS church. You will not be guilted into giving. You will not be shamed for not being able to give as much as you would like. You will not be judged. But you WILL be asked to choose—to set priorities—to participate. Do you choose a life of systemic scarcity, a life of fear and worry—or do you choose a life of hope and dreams. Do you choose a pinched life or an abundant life? Our pledge cards are spiritual tools for the practice of the “assurance of pardon”—practice for the spiritual discipline of hope. Do not give until it hurts, give until it feels good!

Indeed, in the Book of Deuteronomy Moses gathered the children of God on the plains of Moab right before they entered the Promised Land—which, by the way, is not the same as the present day State of Israel, but rather a spiritual metaphor for a place—in whatever time or place—the children of God seek to build the Beloved Community. And on the plains of Moab Moses said to the children of God: “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him...”

Next week, with your pledge card, your church not from the plains of Moab, but from the banks of the lazy and lovely Susquehanna, is likewise going to ask you to choose. Therefore, choose hope. Choose life.

Let us bless the ties that bind, and together, hand in hand, let us cross over to the metaphorical Promised Land—where we have much good and noble work waiting for us. Amen.