

“Life’s persistent and most urgent question is, “What are you doing for others?” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. asked this in one of his speeches and I am asking you the same today. What are you doing with the gifts God gave you?

A young boy once gave all that he had so that Jesus could perform a miracle. He donated five loaves of bread and two fish in order for Jesus to feed over 5,000 people. He didn’t ask for anything in return. He did it out of love and compassion. He used a gift that God had given him, to do the work, God called him to do.

The story of Jesus feeding 5,000 is told in all four gospels. In Matthew it is in chapter 14 verses 13 through 21. Mark’s version is in chapter 6 verses 30 through 44. Luke tells the story in chapter 9 verses 10 through 17, and John relays it in chapter 6 verses 1 through 15. They all tell the story of Jesus and the disciples going to a remote area to be alone and rest. Then 5,000 men with their families show up. Jesus teaches them, heals their sick, and then feeds them with nothing but 5 barley loaves and 2 fish. They all state that Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and had the disciples distribute the food. The difference in the gospels is in how the subject of feeding the people comes up. In John, chapter 6 verse 5, Jesus asked Philip “Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?” even though he knew they didn’t have the money and that He was the only solution. In the other 3 gospels, when it is late afternoon, the disciples tell Jesus to send the people away so that they may find food to eat. Matthew 14:16, Mark 6:37, and Luke 9:13 all state that Jesus replied “give them something to eat yourselves” (The New English Bible) or “You feed them” (New Living Translation). Why is there this difference? Why does John have Jesus ask a question but the others have Jesus make a statement?

Jesus asking where to buy food with money they did not have, and then providing plenty of food for no money, shows that Jesus believed that financial resources are not the most important ones. God can perform miracles and provide the resources needed. The boy that John mentions in his version of the story gives all that he has to help the people around him. If we offer nothing to God, he will have nothing to use; but if we give even a little, he can do great things.

On the other hand, Mathew, Mark, and Luke all state that we are to feed the people. None of their stories mentions a boy providing the food. They all say “we have five loaves of bread and two fish.” This small amount that the “we” gave was blessed and multiplied by Jesus. It was in the giving to Jesus that the resources were multiplied.

How does this apply to us? How can we give when we have so little

for ourselves? What resources do we have and how can they be multiplied? How will this make a difference?

“Christian stewardship is grateful and responsible use of God’s gifts in the light of God’s purpose as revealed in Jesus Christ. Christian stewards, empowered by the Holy Spirit, commit themselves to conscious, purposeful decisions.” This is what the Episcopal Church website states is the working definition of Christian stewardship

Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary says that stewardship is the conducting, supervising, or managing of something; especially the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care.

Romans 12 verses 6 through 13 says: In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have the gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

Each Christian has been given special gifts. If you know your gifts- use them- and if you don’t know-ask God to show you. Your gifts have been given to you to help strengthen and encourage the church. They are to be used to build up God’s family so that together we can build Christ’s church.

Philippians 2:13 says; For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him, and in Ephesians 4:16 it says: He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

All Saints is involved in many different outreach ministries where many different gifts and talents can be utilized. Some of these ministries only require the giving of time, some require a particular skill, but all require the wise use of God-given human resources, abilities, and relationships. I know that sometimes I feel that I don’t have enough to give, but God takes my contribution, uses it, and multiplies it. Imagine what we can do together.

Let’s go back to the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000. I said that in

Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus told the disciples “You feed them.” He commanded them to take care of the people. Well, what were these people hungry for? What a person is hungry for is not always food. Some people are hungry for attention, some for shelter, some for warmth. Some people have a physical hunger and some a spiritual hunger. If we work together, pool our resources, and use wisely what God gave us, we can create a loving, caring community.

Stewardship is a way of life. It is a spiritual practice of regularly giving our time, abilities, energy, and money. It is a joyful act for the sake of God’s world. It is a commitment to a lifetime of action. It is not a noun. It is not a person, place, or thing. It is working with God to take care of the world around us. It is sharing our gifts with others to their benefit. It is feeding their hunger.

Here at All Saints stewardship is preparing meals at Sulzbacher on the first Tuesday of every month. It is bringing food for St. Mary’s pantry. It is being a Meals on Wheels driver. It is pulling an angel from the Angel tree and providing Christmas presents to children of prisoners and children being serviced by The Bridge of Northeast Florida. Stewardship is bringing in school supplies so that the Sulzbacher children and the St. Mary’s children have what they need to begin school. It is providing personal care products to those who need them. It’s bringing pillows and flashlights and such for campers who don’t have them. Stewardship is rolling up our sleeves so someone else can live off our blood, it is buying underwear to bring on Undy Sunday. Stewardship is Thanksgiving meals for Meals on Wheels recipients and Thanksgiving baskets for the less fortunate who attend the Care Center. It is making lunches for the Habijax workers and it is being a Habijax worker. It is going on a mission trip to El Salvador or to Navajo land or to Mississippi. Stewardship is bringing in store bought and packaged cookies for Kairos. It is mailing care packages to the military. It is reading a book at the care center. Stewardship is praying for those on the prayer list. It is standing at the front door of the church and assisting with name tags. It is being an usher or acolyte. It is singing in the choir. It is ringing handbells or playing the guitar. Stewardship is helping clean the organ pipes. It’s raking and pulling weeds. It’s cooking and washing dishes. It’s hugging and smiling and lifting each other up. It is being on the vestry or finance committees. It is teaching Sunday School or Children’s Chapel or Vacation Bible School. It is knowing, and growing, and going with God.

Stewardship is sending an e-mail that inspires. Elinor Coalson sent me an e-mail back in June that features Wintley Phipps singing “Amazing Grace”. I have listened to that song over and over while thinking about what

to write. My whole body quiets and my mind gets still when I listen to his voice. I finally googled him to learn more about his music and I found this.

Wintley Phipps accepted the Excellence in Mentoring Award in 2004. When asked “What philosophy guides your life?” he replied “There is a purpose and destiny for each life. The most exciting adventure a human being can experience is to connect through service.” Boy was I inspired.

Stewardship: using the gifts God has given us, to do the work God is calling us to do. What you do, with all that you have, after you say, “I believe.”