

## CHRIST THE KING

*‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the realm prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me. Matthew 25:33, 38*

Many of you, I know, were here last week for Cathy George’s inspirational sermon about investing in life, in now. Her most memorable line, to me, as she preached about the parable of the talents, was “You can’t be too greedy in using your talents. You can’t *overinvest* in living your life.”

And then after the service, a large group of us gathered in the parish hall for lunch and a discernment discussion. Cathy asked us to consider two questions: *what do you love about St. John’s as it is?* and *what would you like to have at St. John’s that is missing, or what would you like to have more of?*

The conversation was lively and lengthy. “These people love to talk!” Cathy exclaimed to me at one point. What we love was not surprising: our inclusive, welcoming, accepting character, flexibility and diversity in liturgy and theology, the friendships and caring people have found here, our passion for social justice, and our children, children, children. As Cathy wrote things on newsprint people kept insisting that she wasn’t giving enough points to

our value of children, until finally she made a big black circle at that point and said, WHATEVER!

And then there was a long list of ideas for what people would like to add. I haven't reviewed that list – the vestry has it– but my impression overall is that what people mainly want is not different, but more. More people, more social events, more bible study and adult education, more social justice work, more offerings for children and youth. I don't pretend that this list is exhaustive, so please don't hold me to it. But I believe that what came through was not a desire for fundamental change, but a hunger for an expansion and deepening of the blessings already present and the community we have made here at St. John's.

Cathy told us to dream about our hopes for our parish without worrying about how they would be paid for. (Good for her, she could say that and go hope to her farm in New Hampshire!) But, seriously, she was right, for our task last week. It's hard to dream and hope openly and without reservation when dollar signs keep popping up in your mind.

But this week, I have to talk about dollar signs. Because we held our Discernment Day last week, the vestry decided to delay our annual stewardship drive just a bit. Ordinarily we'd have our In Gathering today; instead, it'll occur in two weeks, December 4<sup>th</sup>, Advent Two. Today, it's time, and it's my job, to ask you to think deeply and prayerfully about how to respond to our call to life together here at St John's. Because a call to contribute time, talent, and treasure is indeed a call to that life, a life lived in loving community, a life filled with all we recounted last week and lived in hope for all we visioned. A holy life, a God- blessed life.

One question Cathy asked us was how our life here at St. John's had changed our lives elsewhere— what do we take away? I found those responses most moving and inspiring: folks talked not only about spiritual renewal and refreshment for the week to come, about some talked about they had changed their workplace environments by bringing some of the community spirit at St John's in to the office. And some spoke with passion about the need to spread that spirit farther and wider in a hurt and broken city and world.

Please pray about this, my dear friends, as you contemplate your annual pledge. And pray, as well, about what you can *bring into* the community as well as what you take away.

Some of you may have heard me tell of how I once decided how to weigh my pledge, when I was still layperson. I was wanting to get a cleaning woman, since I was both working full time going to seminary, as a single mother. But then I thought: *what's more important to me, a cleaner house, or what I find every Sunday, and in-between, at my parish?*

So, I upped my pledge, and had a dustier house for several more years.

I know this is a version of the NPR –type solicitation: how much do you pay for a latte at Starbucks? And the more orthodox Christian practice is to talk about proportional giving, or the tithe. That you can find explained and demonstrated in the stewardship brochure you'll be receiving in the mail from us shortly. It's another way of measuring how to think about giving.

But however you think about it, please DO think about it, long and hard. And pray. Because we need what you can give, we really, really do. We are looking at a tough financial year ahead, for all kinds of reasons, and

we are looking ahead also with the hopes and dreams we shared together last Sunday.

What you can pledge to St John's in terms of time, talent and treasure is first of all a gift to yourself: a gift of all you receive here in this community. And it's a gift to the community, so that we can keep on giving. And ultimately, as Jesus reminds us in our Gospel today, what we give to ourselves and others, in love, is ultimately a gift to God. *Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.*

My dear friends, don't fear to invest, and overinvest, in this life, *this here, this now*. You can't afford not to. None of us can. Let us pray

We have tasted the fruit of the earth, O God.  
We have seen autumn trees hung heavily with heaven's gifts.  
We have known people pregnant with your spirit of generosity.  
Let these be guides to us this day and in the days to come.  
And may Mary who knew her womb filled with your goodness  
teach us the wisdom that is born amidst pain.  
May we know that deeper than any fallowness in us  
is the seed planted in the womb of our souls.  
May we know that greater than any barrenness in the world  
is the harvest to be justly shared.

Alleluia! Amen

