

**Stewards of the Church**  
**Matthew 23:23**  
**October 22, 2017 – Stewardship Sunday**

For the last five weeks we've been concentrating on the Guiding Principles of our Long Range Plan, a plan we call "Our Faithful Journey." Let me start by stating that I really like that name – "Our Faithful Journey." We are all on a journey, a journey through life, and a journey with Christ. I've stated a couple times in the past weeks that one of my favorite musical prayers is "Lead Me Lord," and how often have I included in our pastoral prayer, "Lord, lead us in the path that you would have us walk." Indeed, as Christians, our journey should be lead by Christ, supported by Christ, for we know that Christ walks with us in that path of righteousness.

Our church is also on a journey. A little over a year ago, we celebrated the first fifty years of that journey. We had a wonderful celebration, as we recalled the rich memories of a wonderful journey. But then. . . then we asked, where do we go from here? What path is Christ calling us to walk? Where will that path lead? How will we proceed on the journey?

The journey of this church is a journey that involves each and every one of us. All of us, you and I, are a part in that journey. If you're in your nineties, you hold the institutional memory. You hold the wisdom. You remember from whence we came. You remember the joys and the challenges along the way. We need that. It's important that you share that. If you're only nine years old, you're an important part of this journey as well. As I stated last week, you bring the energy, the vitality, the excitement to our journey; and you bring the support for the future. It's your job to learn from the ninety year olds, to continue the journey for the next five and ten and maybe even fifty years.

I believe with all my heart that God has called this church. . . called this church to be what our previous bishop liked to call "a mission outpost" in North Olmsted, Ohio. I believe we are called to be a beacon of light, of hope, of goodness, of love in this part of the world. I believe we are called to show the world the joys of a Christ-centered, grace-filled life, living in the goodness of the Holy Spirit. I believe we are called to share the Good News of God's Amazing Love with the people of North Olmsted, the Westside of Cleveland and beyond. That news is simply too great to keep it to ourselves. We must share it. We must radiate the love of Christ to the world.

So today is Stewardship Sunday. Today is a day when we ask for your commitment and your estimate of financial support for the coming year. We do live in a real world. "Our Faithful Journey" cannot happen without financial resources. We need resources to share the news; we need publicity; we need funds

for mission work; we need funds to support the loving relationship within our church community. Indeed your financial support is vital to the journey. In a few moments, we will ask you to bring your estimate of giving cards forward, and place them in the basket that we might consecrate them to the glory of God, the work of the church, and the support of our journey.

But as necessary as your financial commitment may be, today is about more than just finances. As I thought about scriptures for today, I considered all the standard stewardship scriptures, Amos and his giving of the first fruits, the parable of the widow giving her last two copper coins – that one is a favorite for stewardship sermons; and, by the way, we don't want the last two coins from anyone. Some of us are greatly blessed and able to contribute greatly to the church's finances, and some of us are barely able to pay the bills. I firmly believe in the call for each to give according to their ability and take according to their needs; and if your ability only allows you to give two copper coins, that's okay. You are no less a member of this congregation for your giving.

But the scripture I chose for today – one single verse from Matthew sums up today's call to "Our Faithful Journey." In this scripture, Jesus is criticizing the Pharisees. Nothing new there. . . Jesus regularly found fault with the legalism of the Pharisees. Here Jesus states that tithing is important. The biblical tithe is 10% of your income. It's a good guideline for giving to your church, but again, I note – some can give more and some can't afford the 10%; each should give according to their ability. But Jesus tells the Pharisees, the tithe is important, but more important are the matters of the heart. Hear again this verse, as Eugene Peterson paraphrases it in *The Message*:

"You're hopeless, you religion scholars and Pharisees! Frauds! You keep meticulous account books, tithing on every nickel and dime you get, but on the meat of God's Law, things like fairness and compassion and commitment – the absolute basics! – you carelessly take it or leave it. Careful bookkeeping is commendable, but the basics are required."

And so it's Stewardship Sunday, and your church needs the careful bookkeeping. Your church needs the financial support. If we are to take "Our Faithful Journey" we need to purchase some supplies for the trip, and we may need to hire a guide along the way. But stewardship is about more than money. The basics are required – fairness, compassion and commitment. These Guiding Principles are about the basics. The finances are needed to support the foundation of some of them, but your time, your commitment, your compassion, your prayers are also needed to make "Our Faithful Journey" a successful journey. Over the course of the next year, some of you will be asked to give a little more time to

specific projects associated with the principles. Some of you will be asked to reorganize the tremendous amount of time you already spend for the church; and over the next year, all of you will be asked to pray for our church and “Our Faithful Journey.”

In your Stewardship Packet this week, each of you received a card listing the five Guiding Principles for “Our Faithful Journey.” It’s our hope, your planning team’s hope, that you will not only read this card, but live it. Commit it to memory, and commit your time, your talents, your resources, and your prayers to the fulfillment of these principles.

This week, I did what every good preacher does. . . I looked up the word “stewardship” in the dictionary. You know, none of the definitions said anything about money. The closest they came was the care for resources. Indeed that’s our call, to care for the church as the church continues its journey into the future.

I believe in this church; and I believe in this congregation. I have little doubt that, with each of you as stewards on the journey, with all of us together as stewards on the journey, “Our Faithful Journey” will be a wonderful journey, as we spread the love, the joy, and the peace of Christ to all whom we meet.

God bless you all, God bless our church, and God bless “Our Faithful Journey.” Amen.

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