

## From the Pastor's Desk: A message on Stewardship

I believe Covid-19 has reminded us of at least one thing over the last eight months ... how, delays in life ... *really* suck. Not being able to go out and do, what we want, when we want, and how we want! Last week's Gospel story, of the "Ten Bridesmaids" underscores this reality too, didn't it?

In Jesus' story, the bridegroom was sooo... delayed that half of the bridesmaids no longer had enough oil for their lamps so they could fulfill their duty. These young girls were unable to lead the new couple from the Bride's father's house, to the actual site of the wedding at the Groom's father's home. Fully one-half of the bridesmaids had to go buy oil before they could lead their couple to the wedding, by the time they obtained the needed oil and returned to the couple, the procession was over. The bridal party had already arrived and ... the partying, was underway. The foolish maids lack of planning ended-up literally leaving them ... *out in the cold*. They were unable to experience the joy and celebration of this festive occasion.

Like me, do you sometimes put off for today something that can be done tomorrow? We lose track of something important, as we work hard to do other things don't, we? We take on something new and get so lost in the details, that we forget about the regular things in life. Except over the last few weeks, without the weekly ability to worship and praise God, in the company of Christian brothers and sisters ... have we forgotten how much we rely upon each other, in fulfilling Christ's mission? We get so focused upon what we must do, that we forget what we can do in partnership with Jesus and our neighbors.

Yes, Covid-19 has made physical contact with Garrett College students impossible, if not unsafe. But our SING mission continues to service students, who are truly in need. Game Night continues to offer community to those outside of church, to those who like the challenge of group games. "Life After 45," after months of just being only Zoom-based joke sessions has recently been able to return to small groups for our... monthly "*Fellowship and Food around jokes and laughter*". The Senior Market-rate Housing initiative was presented to the county commissioners last week and will continue with a follow-up meeting between the County Administrator, Garrett County Community Action and I, while I continue as President of the Board for the Accident Community Housing Corporations subsidized senior and disabled housing apartment known as "Town View Village." I continue to work with recovering veterans as the congregation operates two different Bible studies (Wednesday lay run and Thursday Small Group) to enable congregational and community members to spend time in different ways to

explore and grapple with God's word. To find God's grace and hope, as we grapple with and try to understand the "oil", of God's Word within gospel & sacrament.

It is through the partnership of his Jewish and Gentile congregants that St. Paul was able to express Gospel unity. Just as his partnership with Peter, James and John was celebrated with a handshake in Jerusalem. The resulting "relief work" was simultaneously a work of grace, an act of Christian "partnership", and ... an expression of love. Something Paul compares to the utter self-giving of Christ for others (2Cor 8:9) because he is convinced that participation in the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Christ both enables and requires a community for caring and concern.

Without regular in-person worship ... giving is down. If your circumstances allow, you might live into Paul's words about the Macedonians who: "...voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means" (2Co 8:3). Shepherd of the Hills still has much work to do on this mountaintop and can only do this work in partnership as we work to fulfill our Lord's call. After all, St. Paul did write: "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2Co 9:7) So, as we enter into the season of giving will you offer-up your time, talents, and/or treasure for your neighbor? Celebrating all we do in Jesus' name within Shepherd of the Hills, within our community, and around the world ... I invite you to consider increasing your giving for 2021 by as little as 1% of your household income. Afterall, perhaps our Covid-19 restrictions have created some extra space in your budget. You can help us to realize what partnership can look like in as we continue to move into our new future.

In Christ!

*Pastor Rick*