

Speaking of Stewardship

Making Christ Known—September 2004



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His Banner Over Me Is Love

Maybe you or a small someone you know has sung this in Vacation Bible School. It has a catchy tune and you will find it going through your mind once you even think of it, just like the memorable “It’s a Small World” does when you visit Disneyworld or even THINK of your trip there.

“He brought me to his banqueting table — His banner over me is love!”

“Jesus is the Rock of my salvation — His banner over me is love!”

“There’s therefore now no condemnation — His banner over me is love!”

And so in the sure confidence we have in God’s promises, we can now respond, giving back just a small portion of all God has given to us. First the gifts, then our response.

*Almighty God, draw our hearts to you,
guide our minds, fill our imaginations, control our wills,
so that we may be wholly yours. Use us as you will,
always to your glory and the welfare of your people.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

What If?

I recently met with the stewardship/finance team of a congregation that wanted very much to make some significant improvement in congregational giving, perhaps even significant enough to call it a turnaround.

The general assumption was that if they came to church, they would give. But although membership was up and church attendance had increased, per communicant giving had gone down for three consecutive years.

But then someone asked, “What if everyone in the congregation would give out of gratitude?” That one observation resulted in a discovery of giant proportions by everyone in the room, and dramatic, even for the most seasoned stewardship leader.

- ❑ All would grow spiritually.
- ❑ Givers would have a sense of ownership and be more involved.
- ❑ The long-standing cycle of “giving to needs” would be broken.
- ❑ It would give me joy.

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- ❑ Our personalities would change, becoming more giving and helpful.
- ❑ We would eliminate the sense of giving out of obligation.
- ❑ Dollars would no longer be the issue.
- ❑ The unchurched would be thirsty for what we have. [My favorite]

No one in the room could come up with any negative consequences. It was an awesome thing to consider the power of God unleashed in a congregation in which everyone gives out of gratitude for what God has done and continues to do for us in Jesus Christ.

-- Ed Kruse

A Long Right Arm

A few years ago Pastor Gary Langness had the privilege of teaching a seminar on stewardship to a class of Tanzanian seminary students at the Lutheran College in Iringa. Because only a few of the students were fluent in English, he had been provided with a translator.

In trying to make a point about people being unwilling to share, Gary used the words "tight," "tightwad," "cheap," and then "stingy" but got only puzzled looks. Turning to his translator, he explained what he was trying to say. The young man thought for a moment and then shook his head, but he did not know what Swahili word would convey that thought.

All of a sudden a young man in the class with a large smile said, "Oh, you mean having a short right arm!"

"A short right arm?" Gary responded.

"Yes, it means your arm is not long enough to reach your back pocket to take out your wallet!"

It was a great image and teacher and students had fun with that over the next few class periods. Whenever he

A Gift For Me?

(Sixth in a Series on Spiritual Gifts)

God has given you two important gifts. The first is the gift of faith in Jesus Christ, His work of redemption, and the forgiveness of sins. The second is the gift of one or more special abilities to be used to glorify God and build up the body of Christ. Many Christians are uncertain about the subject of spiritual gifts. The Lutheran Confessions make almost no mention of them, but there is a growing interest in the subject and the ELCA has a spiritual gifts inventory available on its website (http://www.elca.org/dcm/evangelism/assessments/assess4_spiritgifts.ghtml).

Each month we will explore some of the gifts. They are in no specific order because no gift is more important than another. Our last newsletter featured advocacy, craftsmanship, and encouragement.

Administration – The believers who have the gift of administration bring order and organization to plans, projects, and special events. They are like "the wind beneath my wings" in the Bette Midler song, providing structure and function to support the use of the gifts of others within the body of Christ. Lydia, the Philippian woman of business and dealer in cloth who organized things for Paul, Silas and Timothy; Jethro, who advised Moses when he was doing too much administratively for the people of Israel, and Gamaliel, who had his eye on the important things in assessing teachings about Jesus, all exercised their gifts of administration. (1 Corinthians 12:28; Romans 12:8; Acts 6:1-7; see also the stories of Jethro, Lydia and Gamaliel)

Apostleship – Apostles use this gift with their faith to grow churches and oversee their development in a broader ministry of the Gospel. In our human evaluation, many of us would tend to rate this gift higher than others in the spectrum of spiritual gifts, and it is of vital importance to building up the body of Christ. However, again we reiterate that no gift is of more importance than another. Stephen and Paul are examples of apostleship—there are others within every community of faith with this gift. (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 and 12:28; Romans 10:15; Acts 8:4 and 13:2-3 and 22:21)

Celibacy – Those who practice this gift voluntarily remain single in order to exercise the freedom it gives to exercise other spiritual gifts without the cares of family life to dilute that focus. Paul was voluntarily single. Old Testament prophets were characteristically single, living out their lives in ministry. (Matthew 19:10-12; 1 Corinthians 7:7-8)

wanted to talk about holding back from God he used the phrase, "Having a short right arm!" And the class would break up with laughter.

In that setting where almost everyone had very little, where survival was a daily issue, Gary realized that those folks knew about giving and they knew about having a "short right arm." They preferred having a "long right arm" for they

knew who had provided them with what they needed for each day and for all of eternity.

What you are doing in your congregation? Why keep it a secret? We are looking for your stewardship stories and successful activities, events or programs for this newsletter. Please share them with Betsy Reese at BetsyReese@att.net.