

Sharing our Gifts of Time, Talent, and Treasure Reading: Mt. 5:1-12 All Saints Day
By the Rev. Karen Faye Siegfriedt; St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Atascadero CA 11/05/23

Take a look at these teacups that once belonged to my mother. (*display*) They are beautifully crafted with a mother-of-pearl inlay and gilded with gold paint. I think my father brought them home from Austria after the war as a gift to my mother, but I am not absolutely sure of that. What I am sure of, is that these teacups were precious to her and she kept them safely ensconced in the cabinet.

One day when I was about 7 years old, we were having tea around the kitchen table. The cups we were using were heavy duty, purchased from Woolworths, stained, and having an occasional chip on the lip. I glanced up at the cabinet and innocently asked my mother, "When are we going to use those cups in the cupboard?" She answered: "When the queen comes to visit." I replied: "But the queen is never going to come to visit us." She simply smiled and shrugged.

Some thirty years later, I made an executive decision at her home. I took the cups down from the cupboard, made some tea, and served my family tea and cookies. It was the day after my mother's funeral! She had just turned 63 years old! (*sigh*) Now I know why she didn't want to use these teacups back when we were young. She was afraid we would break them with our clumsy children's hands. Perhaps later, she was just waiting for the right time that never seemed to come. And then, it was too late.

Sometimes, we hang onto things too long, waiting for an ideal time, or for an emergency that might never come, or hoping we can pass them along to our children in their later years. Instead of blessing others with our gifts in the NOW, we hold onto them tightly, waiting for that special day.

While my mother held onto these teacups too tightly, she was very generous when it came to her stewardship of time and talent. She was very active on the political front, becoming the President of the Boston League of Women Voters. She worked tirelessly for political candidates in whom she believed, never getting discouraged when they lost. She often volunteered to be the secretary of various environmental groups, coming home late at night after the many meetings, typing out the minutes before going to bed. In summary, she had a big heart and gave generously of her gifts and skills and passion. She is one of the saints that I am honoring today at our All Saints Day Worship Service.

When I think of all the saints here at St. Luke's who have given generously of their time, talent, and treasure, three people come to mind. 1) Bob Cummings was a long time, very generous supporter of St. Luke's. He and his wife Lila were active members of a very vibrant community. He was a teacher at the high school, originally from W. Virginia, and he had two wonderful blended marriages. We just dedicated the Cummings Fellowship Hall, formerly the Undercroft in honor of his memory.

2) Then there was Woody Miller, husband of Rev. Barbara Miller, a teacher at the high school, gave countless hours to crafting the woodwork of the lecterns, baptismal font, and doors which grace St. Luke's. He was confirmed as an Episcopalian shortly before his death. 3) And we mustn't forget Florrie Drumm, a retired librarian and an altar guild "lifer". She led her own very quiet and special flower ministry. Florrie took leftover flowers from the altar weekly to people who were shut in, ill, in distress, or otherwise needed special care. May these generous stewards from St. Luke's rest in peace!

When speaking of the principle of stewardship, it goes far beyond our giving to the church. It includes the stewardship of creation, which requires us to lessen our carbon footprint so that there will be enough for the generations who come after us. There is stewardship of the body, which we Christians believe is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Today, many people are becoming more conscious of how they treat the body, mind, and spirit. As a result, they are making more effort to eat, exercise, and sleep rightly as well as carefully tending to their spiritual and emotional lives. Good stewardship 'in all things' is at the core of a healthy society as well as our call to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Today however, I am going to close my comments with a discussion on the stewardship of money. In a few weeks, you will be asked to offer your pledge card on the altar, giving generously of your treasure so that St. Luke's can continue its ministry in this corner of God's Kingdom. People often ask, how much should I give to the church? My answer is always the same: Give abundantly! Because everything we have has been given to us by God, from whom all blessings flow.

Now if you are anything like me and were brought up by parents who struggled during the Great Depression and World War II, you may have a tendency to hold back in your giving. After all, you never know when a major economic depression will fall upon us once again! So to overcome this fear of scarcity, I have embraced the tithe (10% of my income) as the standard of giving. When I was anchored to one church in the past, I tithed my income to that particular church. Today, as I move around the deanery, my giving has expanded to many churches and religious organizations in addition to colleges and organizations that strive for justice and human rights. Steph on the other hand is far more generous than I. She does not need the discipline of tithing but uses the tithe as the beginning baseline of her giving which is quite remarkable.

So what is your standard of giving and how do you make that decision? Holding together a parish church without a rector is no easy task and requires of you the extraordinary giving of your time, skills, leadership, and money. I hope you will continue to be generous as a people beloved by God. Every gift matters this year, and each gift will be accepted, brought to the altar, and blessed before God and our community of faith. Thank you for trusting me to preach on this important subject of stewardship. I look forward to hearing your stories of giving and receiving in just a few minutes.

- So blessed are you who will set aside your first fruits, dedicating a portion of your wealth, works, and wisdom to God...for this is a sacred act.
- Blessed are you who reach out to others by visiting the sick and comforting those who sorrow.
- Blessed are you who witness to the love of God, for you shall be called the children of God.