**Coronado Community Church**

*The Next Step – Part 1*

Luke 21: 1-4

A message by Pastor Eric Smith

November 6, 2022

This is the first of two Sunday messages where we will focus on stewardship.

Let’s begin with the scripture we heard read…

This brief passage is known as the story of the Widow’s Mite.

What is a *mite?* The word was used by the people who translated the King James Bible in the 16th century. The term was used in England during that time. The *mite* spoken of refers the Greek *lepton* – it was the smallest and least valuable coin in Judea in that day. In todays’ economy its value is equivalent to somewhere between ½ cent to a few cents.

The widow was making an offering at the Temple… Jesus saw her do it, and commented on her gift to the disciples. He said…

*all of them have contributed out of their abundance,*

*but she, out of her poverty*

Jesus had no complaint against those who contributed out of their abundance, he simply remarked on the contrast. He might have said, *if anyone has a reason not to make an offering, it is this woman, but she gives anyway*… because the amount is never the issue.

The issue was the generosity of her heart and the stewardship she expressed. That’s exactly true for us, too.

There are four aspects of stewardship to consider today. These are pretty broad strokes, but you’ll have the idea.

One of the bumper sticker slogans of my youth was, *God Don’t Make No Junk*. God made you worthy; no matter how you feel about yourself, or anyone else. Let’s start with our physical worthiness…

We have been given a physical body in which our spirits dwell. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians…

… your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit…

We’re responsible for this dwelling place of God’s Spirit. God’s will for our bodies is healing and wholeness – but how that works in us changes over time because our physical bodies have term limits. Some future day your body will not be able to sustain your spirit, and you will pass from this life into the next. Not a bad thing. This is how God made us. Our stewardship is that while we have these physical bodies we have primary responsibility to treat them well.

An older woman was filling out an application for residency in a retirement village.

She was a bit nervous answering all of the questions about her health, fearing she might be refused admission. She finished the form and then signed her name. Last there was a place where the form asked for her current address.

*Street?* She wrote it down.

*City?* She wrote it down.

*Zip?* She paused and thought … and then printed firmly: *Normal for my age.*

So how is your Zip? How is your body doing? Are you taking care of it? Eating right? Sleeping right? Moving around enough to keep everything working? Going to the Doctor when you need to, rather than skipping it because you don’t like going to the Doctor?

*Caring for your body is stewardship*. Are you taking care of it?

Then there is your mental health.

Anyone can get caught in a downward spiral of unhealthy thinking that leads nowhere good. Most of us have been there at some time in our lives. The COVID isolation that we experienced was hard on mental health.

I have preached a sermon called, *I Always Make Sense to Myself*. We always make sense to ourselves. *We can be crazy as a loon but we’ll still make sense to ourselves*. The essential question is whether we make sense to anyone else.

All of us need to *share our lives with others* – to talk about our lives with others.

To tell our truth to another person. Even if we don’t like to do it. We have to… because *we always make sense to ourselves* – even when people around us know we are not thinking straight.

This is a stewardship issue – management of your life. For your life to stay in balance and for you to be mentally healthy you need to talk about yourself with others who won’t simply agree with everything you say.

The next area of stewardship to talk about is relationships.

Relationships are everything for people of faith. How are your relationships? Who are you at odds with… and why? … and what can you do about it – besides avoiding dealing with someone you don’t want to deal with.

*Do you need to forgive?* Most of us do. We have been hurt or abused or violated or betrayed in some fashion by someone sometime along our journey. *Have you forgiven them?* I’m not suggesting you have to make nice – or even be in contact with that person.

To forgive is to let go. Let go of it – that is for-giving. You can let go of whatever it is. You must not harbor hate or revenge or anger in your life. That’s poison to your soul. Don’t do it… stop doing it. Some of us (like me) have to let go of it over and over again. It’s a stewardship issue. Deal with whatever it is in whatever way you need to and let it go. *Forgiveness is a command of faith* -it’s what Jesus instructed his followers to do.

And not only do we forgive – it’s even bigger than that - you have to love the person who betrayed you . Recall with me that at the last supper Jesus said to his disciples,

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.*

*Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*

*John 13:34*

Then there is our Relationship with Creation… this has become the most pressing area of our expanding stewardship.

Teresa of Avila is a voice of faith from 16th century Spain,

She wrote this piece…

*Christ has no body now on earth but ours,*

*no hands but ours,*

*no feet but ours,*

*Ours are the eyes through which he looks*

*Ours are the hands with which he works.*

*Ours are the feet on which he moves*

*Ours are the voices through which he speaks*

*To this world… with kindness.*

*The creation needs our kindness* so that the earth can heal and humanity has a future.

Our Kindness expressed toward the Creation is the most pressing matter of our stewardship.

The last area of stewardship is Your own spiritual nature.

You are a spiritual being. That is your true nature. As theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin told us - *you’re a Spiritual being having a human experience.*

You are made in the image of God – and God is spirit. We nurture and cultivate our spirituality, so that the most important part of who we does not lie dormant.

Here’s why:

How can heaven – the heaven that is on the other side of this life… a totally spiritual realm… how can it be experienced as wonderful and joyous for anyone who has not nurtured their spirituality? You go to the realm of spirit with no sense of spirit? That does not sound like a happy situation.

There are many ways that you can cultivate and develop your spirituality – explore them … and enjoy it. When we choose connection with God we find deep meaning and satisfaction. *Cultivating your spirit is stewardship of what God has given you.*

Those are four aspects of stewardship: our physical health, our mental health, our relationships, and our spirituality. There are many more, of course. This gives us a starting point in our focus on stewardship.

Let me tell you a stewardship story…

Betty Rathbun was a member of the Claremont United Methodist Church when I was the associate minister there… lots of years ago.

She was retired when I met her and her husband, Loyd. Loyd was a musician, he had been an oboist with the LA Philharmonic. When they retired they moved to Catalina Island and enjoyed living there for many years.

The time came that Loyd’s health required easier access to healthcare professionals so they moved to Claremont. A few years later Loyd passed away, and Betty was by herself.

After a year she decided to join her son’s family in the DC area. She and Loyd had already downsized twice so everything Betty still had in their home was precious to her.

For three months after she made the decision to move *I never saw Betty without a package* in her hand. She meticulously and lovingly gifted her things to those whom she thought would appreciate them most.

One day she gave me a turquoise vase. It is lovely.

What Betty did was to place the precious things that she had. She thought of who each of the things should go to… and then she personally delivered each one.

It was beautiful thing to behold. It was the best demonstration of stewardship I have ever seen.

(and if she knew I was telling you this she’d be a little embarrassed, but pleased)