

**Faith without Works is Dead**  
**Fourth in a Stewardship Series *Let your Yes be YES!***  
**October 22, 2006**  
**Rev. Susan J. Morrison**

This morning's scripture lessons remind us that it is not enough to "just" have faith. Once we receive God's blessings and know the grace of Jesus Christ in our lives, we are expected to respond to those blessings with a generous and grateful heart.

The first lesson is from James 2: 14 – 17; 3: 13 – 18 and is a paraphrase from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*. You will find a copy of this lesson on an insert in your bulletin.

Writes James:

Dear friends, do you think you'll get anywhere in this if you learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, "Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!" and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup – where does that get you? Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense? In other words, faith without works is dead!

Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here's what you do: Live well, live wisely, live humbly. It's the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts. Real wisdom, God's wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, living right with God and treating each other with dignity and honor.

The gospel lesson is from Matthew 6: 19 – 24; 31 – 34. Please stand for the reading of the gospel.

Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or – worse! – stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.

Your eyes are windows into your body. If you open your eyes wide in wonder and belief, your body fills us with light. If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust, your body is a dank cellar. If you pull the blinds on your windows, what a dark life you will have!

You can't worship two gods at once. Loving one god, you'll end up hating the other. Adoration of one feeds contempt for the other. You can't worship God and Money both.

What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with *getting*, so you can respond to *God's giving*. People who don't know God and the way God works fuss over things, but you know both God and how God works. Steep your life in God – reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.

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I must begin with an apology to the Shapers and Hangers in our midst. Not only am I stepping out of the pulpit this morning, but I'm going to ask you to help me with interpreting the word! For those of you who missed the sermon on what I'd call "worship types" let me offer a quick review. Marcia McFee, worship planner and writer, has suggested that there are four basic worship types represented by the congregation at any given worship service. There are the Shapers who expect everything to be the same week after week. Structure and tradition give them inner peace. Then there are the Thrusters who are goal oriented and come to church wanting purpose and action and a goal to strive for in the week to come. Swingers are touchy feely and love it when worship appeals to all of the senses. They love change and anything new stimulates their spirituality. And finally there are the Hangers who come to church to simply be. They want to be quiet, inconspicuous and most enjoy long silences where words don't interfere with their contemplation. It is in the silence that they come closest to God. Do you recognize yourself among these worship types? Remember, when you're most upset with what is happening in worship, someone else

is finding God especially in that moment!!

So, my apologies to the Shapers this morning because things aren't in their regular order – why even the offering comes before our prayers! – and mid week I changed the gospel lesson and Sharon Dunbar Link will lead the morning prayers so that I can go out and spend a few minutes with the Senior high class to help them plan November's Student Day. And apologies to the Hangers, too, because I am about to ask you to participate and engage in interpreting the Word. But, beware, Thrusters and Swingers, because I think that this sermon might be for you and cause you a bit of discomfort.

Let's begin with the contemporary parable, the Stewardship Story, that was just read. It sounds like a story that Jesus would share, doesn't it? He talked about sheep and vineyards and fishermen in his day. Were he from Iowa, he might have spoken about cornfields and bushel baskets and the fall harvest.

The point of the story is the point of the scripture lessons this morning. The man who failed to fill his basket because there was always something better on the horizon, illustrates James' message that unless we act on our faith, our faith comes up empty. The empty bushel basket is also a symbol for what Jesus was trying to tell his disciples. When they worry about the future and don't pay attention to the present moment, they become preoccupied with getting and have no capacity left to respond to God's blessings in their lives.

Maybe we need to have an east coast version of our Stewardship Story. It would be like taking a grocery list to the store to buy fruit for a large fruitbowl. Now forgive me for digressing, but from experience, if such a grocery list was in the hands of a male shopper, the fruit would be purchased without any problem and the grocery bag would be filled with melon, oranges, apples, bananas, strawberries and kiwi fruit. But if the list was in the hands of a female shopper, the shopping excursion might take much longer. At the first store, the melons might not be ripe and the strawberries might be overripe. And so, rather than buying a few things, the woman decides to try another store. At the second store, the melons are overripe and the strawberries are green and there are no ripe bananas. The shopper crosses town to the third store, gets stuck in traffic and has to go to the soccer field to pick up the children, never reaching her final grocery store destination. The grocery bag is empty. It's the equivalent of an empty bushel basket. The shopper has lost her chance to fill it.

Or consider the various stages of parenting. Too often parents spend so much time reading about and watching for the next developmental stage of their child that they miss the magic of the moment.

Or when it comes to money, we get so anxious about the future, about our security, about not being dependent on anyone when we grow old, that we hoard and save and invest while missing the opportunity to give our money to those causes that have such need and do so much good. Jesus said it without mincing words. You can't worship both God and Money.

I always liked John Wesley's approach. Make all the money you can so that you can save all the money you can so that you can give all the money you can. His intention was that Christians should work hard and use our God given abilities to make as much as we can. He also expected believers to be thrifty. Don't buy needless things and don't let culture dictate the ways that you spend your money, Wesley would advise. And when you care for your self and family, don't keep more than you need. Always give it away to the less fortunate. Sounds like Jesus, doesn't it? Where your treasure is, there your heart is also.

So how does all this apply to our own Stewardship decisions that we will be making this coming week as we pray and decide how much of our financial resources we will pledge to Holy Trinity? Simply this. Stewardship is a way of life. It is not a once a year financial campaign at Holy Trinity. It is an every day way of living our gratitude to God. New, every morning is our opportunity to fill our bushel baskets with the spiritual joys of life: a kind word, a thoughtful deed, a gift of time, talent or resources in the service of others.

This is the day. Let's practice filling this bushel basket with our blessings. Help me fill this basket with blessings that you receive from your church. How does Holy Trinity bless your life? (Congregants name Holy Trinity blessings.)

Our response to those blessings comes through our prayers, presence, gifts and service to our church. On the back of your scripture insert, you will find a pie shape graph of how your pledge enables these blessings to happen. Note the different categories – and see how your money is distributed. Think about Rev. Titsi Moyo’s testimony last week. Even though only 18% of the budget goes to Mission Shares and of that money probably only ½ of 1% goes to Africa University – remember the difference that your few dollars make in the lives of many, many people.

As you consider your pledge for the coming year, I want you to remember the importance of proportionate giving. I hope that everyone strives to give away a tithe or 10% of their income. Some give 10% to their church. Others give 5% to the church and the other 5% to charities of their choice. Proportionate giving means that we all don’t give the same because we all don’t earn the same or have the same income. If your income is \$30,000. a year then your tithe would be \$3,000. If your income is \$100,000. then your tithe would be \$10,000.

The Jack and Jill Preschool sets a high standard for us all. This year, the school estimates an income of approximately \$66,000. And this non profit organization always gifts the church for use of its rooms, utilities and maintenance. Now a tithe would be \$6,600. But the school has budgeted \$9,000. to give to Holy Trinity which is almost 14% of its income. Oh, that we would all do that well in gifting a church that houses all of our spiritual needs.

I loved reading the story this summer about Dwayne Wade who was named the Most Valuable Player in the 2006 NBA basketball finals in which his team, the Miami Heat, beat the Dallas Mavericks. Wade, who completed his third year of professional basketball, is already being compared to Michael Jordan. But perhaps Wade should be known for another trait: he tithes 10% of his \$3.03 million income to his home church in Chicago. That’s proportionate giving!

“Isn’t it obvious,” writes James, “that God talk without God acts is outrageous nonsense?” We are SO blessed. As we name our personal blessings this morning on our bookmark insert, let us fill these empty bushel baskets with all of the ways that God blesses us day by day. Please take out your blessings card and write the best of your blessings upon it. It is only when we recognize God’s goodness in our lives that we can respond with thankful and generous tithes and offerings.

And as you pray about your pledge to Holy Trinity, I ask you to keep the scripture insert and the cost of our operating expenses nearby. Next Sunday **WILL BE THE DAY**. You will have a chance to respond with gratitude to your own basket being heaped with blessings. May we all rejoice and be glad in our giving! Amen. Amen.