

October 16, 2022 19th Sunday after Pentecost
Gratitude and Generosity Team Dialogue
Deb Strand, Linda Herman, Beth Ubbelohde, Rev. Jen Nagel

Genesis 32:22-31, Psalm 121
2 Timothy 3:14-17, Luke 18:1-8a

Jen: Let us pray. May the words of our lips and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Grace and peace to you, beloved of Christ Jesus.

This morning we're doing something a little different.
I am thankful to Linda Herman, Deb Strand and Beth Ubbelohde
for teaming up for this dialogue sermon.

We're preaching *together* this morning.

These three are our Gratitude and Generosity Team.

In some congregations, we'd call this our Stewardship Committee.

Here at Hope we talk about stewardship with the *language* of Gratitude and Generosity.

Linda: Yes, the Gratitude and Generosity team is called to lift up and express gratitude to all the Hope folk who faithfully "step up," offering prayers, and sharing their time, talents, and financial gifts with the congregation. We've been praying, reading materials about faithful stewardship, and talking with each other about how we have developed our own values about sharing our blessings.

Jen: Thanks, Linda.

You three are helping us experience the scripture passages for this Sunday
through the lens of stewardship,
through the lens of gratitude,
through the lens of generosity.

How did we prepare for today, you may be wondering:)

As a group we began *reading* these passages a few weeks ago,
taking time to pray together,
and *to listen* for how these passages speak to each of us and to our congregation,
to wrestle with the texts, if you will.

Early on we noticed themes.

Beth: **Wrestling.** One Theme is wrestling. In the Genesis reading I interpreted Jacob's wrestling with the being that he identified as God as a metaphor. Jacob was a prosperous man who already had been blessed with a large family and many possessions. I think he was wrestling with the challenge of living a faithful, generous life in light of this. He lived his faith and asked God for what he wanted and needed as when he was asking for a blessing.

Deb: **Persistence.**

We heard about persistence

In the gospel the widow keeps asking for what she needs

From the unjust judge.

Even though he continues to deny her.

Timothy is encouraged to persist in his ministry.

Linda: Prayer. I noticed that prayer is woven into these readings.

Maybe Jacob, described as wrestling, is praying before seeking a blessing.

And Psalm 121 prays, "The Lord will keep you from evil," to which we might respond, "Amen and may it be so."

Beth: Abundance. I noticed abundance in the Psalm, for instance, where it states "My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth." God has made the earth and all things in it. God has blessed us abundantly and provides everything we need.

Linda: A book we read together this year is called Generosity, Stewardship and Abundance: A Transformational Guide.

And I was taken by abundance.

Often we think of stewardship in terms of scarcity. We don't have enough.

But it might be better to think of stewardship in terms of abundance, the abundance of God's blessings.

Deb:

A couple of sections in this book caught my attention.

A quote was...

Where your treasure is,

There will your heart be also.

Jesus tells us if we want our heart to be with God

Then we invest in God's mission

At times our hearts will be discouraged

But we stay the course and have faith that our hearts are with God.

I was thinking about my past as a social worker

I worked with children and their families

At times the children were hurt by people they loved

Many times I lost heart and I found myself praying

Lord have mercy on us all.

It was a plea for the children, their families

And for me

to continue to love

The children and their parents

My neighbors

Jen: There are such rich themes this morning.

And through them you've got us moving into talk about stewardship.

In all of the readings there's a struggle to live faithfully.

How do we share our time and talents?

How do we make sense of money and all the choices - faithful choices - that we face?

I've heard you three talking this year about something called the "money autobiography."

Deb: Even saying that name is hard, uncomfortable,
not how we usually talk in our culture, vulnerable.

Jen: I know it's hard...

AND I've been so moved by the way you three leaned into this learning.

You've been vulnerable with one another

and today you are being vulnerable with the congregation.

So what is this money autobiography?

Beth, can you tell us about that?

Beth: A money autobiography is a way to look at how you have developed your perceptions and relationship to money and possessions. It's a set of formative questions designed to explore attitudes developed in childhood within your family; how these may have changed or remained the same and how this has shaped our values, our practice of stewardship and our faith as an adult.

Jen: So, give us some examples of these questions that the autobiography asks, ... and then tell us how you wrestled with them!

Beth: What do you remember about your parents' attitude toward money? (pause for people to absorb) Do you have a memory of how they gave to the church or thought about giving? (pause) How do you feel this has contributed to your own values and how you presently give? (pause)

Linda: I can jump in here.

Both my parents grew up on midwestern farms during the great depression.

My dad left home when he was 14 to make his own way in the world and my mother, at 14, began working a job, both to help provide for herself and contribute to saving the family farm.

We didn't talk about money in my family, when I was growing up, because there was always enough,

But very clearly my mom and dad operated with opposite views on spending money and using resources.

For my mom, waste and extravagance were deeply wrong, so, as the faithful homemaker, she pinched pennies, clipping coupons for groceries and shopping at garage sales.

My dad was delighted that he could give me and my sister the childhood with the security and material comfort - sometimes in excess - that he had longed for as a child.

From both my mom and dad I learned gratitude for having enough, knowing that pinching pennies is a choice I make, not a necessity.

Jen: Linda, this is a great example of looking back to explore what you've learned from your family of origin.

I'm curious if any of this translated to their involvement with church or their giving to the church.

Linda: I don't recall my mom and dad discussing their spending, including giving to the church.

What has stuck with me, however, is that every week they placed their envelope in the offering plate -

always face down so that their name and the amount wouldn't show,

and mom always made sure I had my little envelope for the Sunday school offering.

Beth: Here's another money autobiography question: "Reflect on times when you have given to meet the needs of another."

Deb:

I have a clear memory of learning this lesson,

I grew up on a farm

We had plenty to eat and

I never experienced hunger.

My husband Erik's first church was a poor working class neighborhood.

People, our neighbors,
Came to the door frequently.
They needed money, food, sometimes clothing
They were broke, hungry and at times hopeless.
It was an important time for our young family
To learn from the community.
We learned to give what we could
And sometimes that was just peanut butter sandwiches.

Jen: It sounds like in your lives you've learned a lot about persistence,
about faithfulness,
and that you've had some great teachers,
often in your family and in the community around you.

Beth Something else we want to emphasize about stewardship is that it's not just about money, but truly about our time and talents also. We all have talents and abilities to do God's work. This is about lending our time and talents to God's ministries as another form of stewardship.

Linda: Paul urges Timothy to proclaim the message,
be persistent,
encourage, and patiently teach,
carrying out his ministry fully.
So, the theme of this year's annual ministry campaign is Gratitude in All Things.
As a team we are sharing the message,
we're being persistent,
and we're encouraging you to join us in this shared ministry.

Jen: Thank you Linda, Deb, Beth, for your faithful witness.
And, thank you, church, for all the ways you live with gratitude and generosity.
Can I get an Amen?