



From ELCA Stewardship

<http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Discipleship/Stewardship.aspx>

1. Following Jesus

Matthew 6:25-33 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life...But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches the crowds and his disciples about their relationship with God and their discipleship in the world. In these verses, Jesus speaks about how God provides for our every need and how undue concern for our possessions can get in the way of our living as his disciples.

These words speak to us today as we wrestle with the daily realities of our lives. We often find ourselves over-scheduled, over-extended, and over-drawn. Our lives are cluttered with too many commitments, too many possessions. We can be consumed by it all—we wonder “Will I have enough?” We fear not wearing the right clothes, not driving the right car, not having the latest electronic toy, not living in the right house. Too often our things define who we are.

Jesus comes to us in the midst of our fears and announces—“Do not worry! God has provided for all of your needs!” What does it mean for us to live in relationship with Jesus? How might our daily discipleship help us to live more simply, trusting in God’s abundance?

2. Facing the Truth

Psalm 51:10-12 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Why is it so hard to MAKE IT SIMPLE? We face daily a complex world of our own making. We feel pushed and pulled by forces beyond our control. And when things feel like they are out of our control, we often feel afraid. We become like the disciples in the boat with Jesus (Mark 4:37-41). We are afraid that we are perishing, tossed about by the “wind and the waves” in our lives.

Imagine being one of the disciples in the boat. When you decide to wake Jesus up, what would you expect of him? What do you need from Jesus in the midst of the storms of your life? Can you hear Jesus' question in the moments of calm in your life? "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?"

Jesus' question can lead us to hear the words of the psalmist, "Create in me, O

God...put a new and right spirit within me...Do not cast me away...do not take away...Restore to me...sustain in me..." Look at all that God does in our lives. Where do we focus? On the wind and waves? Can we focus instead on what God provides? And how do our choices matter for what we see?

3. Acting Together

John 13:34-35 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

In the upper room, at the Last Supper, Jesus gives this new commandment to his disciples, to love one another. They (we) are to love one another "as he has loved" them (us). It is about witness to the world. It is how the world around us will see and know that we are disciples of Jesus. This commandment is about community. It is about the common good. It is about our living as disciples of Jesus. He commands that we follow him together. He commands us to love one another.

These are strange and foreign words in a culture that worships individualism. It is an odd concept in an economy that is based on the premise that the one who dies with the most "things" wins. It is hard to comprehend this commandment in a time where we all seek something more—more house, more car, more status, more power, more "stuff." In this drive for "more" we find ourselves isolated and feeling alone. We are driven to protect our stuff. So we fear our neighbor, we build higher fences and security systems; we live in fear of losing what we have accumulated.

Jesus commands us to love one another—he calls us into relationships, he calls us into his community. His command is to love one another "as he has loved us!" In this community we move into relationship with Jesus and one another.

This truly is a radical command—in our culture of individualism, none of us has enough. We all are driven to get more. But in this community of Jesus' disciples, we begin to see that God provides us with more than enough!

4. Sharing Enough

Philippians 4:11b-13 I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

What does "contentment" feel like? This is a difficult question in our current culture. When surveys have asked "How much is enough?" responses have consistently been "Twenty percent more than I have now." If that is true, how do we break the endless circle that this leads us toward—it is always "twenty percent more." We are told over and over every day—"You don't have enough...What you have is fragile and could be gone at any moment...You have to go get more!" These messages come from a world focused on scarcity.

In this setting how do we understand our relationship with God? God is creator—we are God's creatures. How do we live in relationship with our creator? Martin Luther reminds us in his explanation of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed "that God has created me and all that exists...God daily and abundantly provides...all the

necessities and nourishment for this body and life...out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all!" It is in this relationship that we recognize that God has abundantly provided us with all that we need. Living in that abundance we give of the blessings we have received.

If we focus on the scarcity, we never have enough. When we focus on God's abundant blessings, there is more than we can ever imagine. Recognizing God's abundant blessings we experience Paul's message to the Philippians in our own lives. We can be content with what we have because we know that we are blessed and can "do all things through him who strengthens us."