

Stewardship

Genesis 12:1-2; Psalm 24:1; 1 Peter 4:8-10; John 10:7-10
November 15, 2015 — Consecration Sunday
The Rev. Dr. Ritva H. Williams



[SLIDE 26] As I was preparing for today, thinking and praying about what God might want me to say about our Scripture readings, I was reminded of a little devotional I read some time ago on “Why Applying Scripture to Our Lives is So Tough” by Rick Warren.¹ He asserts that most people who read the Bible don’t really apply what they read to their daily lives because (1) application requires serious thought, (2) Satan fights application, and (3) we naturally

resist change which is a really problem because God’s main purpose is to change our lives, to make us more like Jesus. Warren concludes that we grow spiritually and become more mature Christians by applying God’s Word to our lives but it is only with the help of the Holy Spirit that we can overcome the obstacles that make life application so tough. My immediate takeaway was that if we’re serious about applying Scripture in our daily lives we need to immerse ourselves in prayer, worship, study, caring conversations with other believers, and every other opportunity that opens us up to the power of the Holy Spirit.

When I look at today’s Scripture readings, I wonder if applying biblical teachings to daily life is as difficult as Rick Warren makes it out be. It seems that we have a good grasp on some, not so much on others.

[STEP 1] In our Old Testament lesson, God calls Abram to leave his country, his kindred, and his father’s house, promising to bless him with a new home, a great name, and numerous descendants so that all the families of the earth would be blessed in him. If Abram had a tagline it would be “blessed to be a blessing.”



[STEP 2] The writer of 1 Peter urges his hearers to “maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining.... use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms” Another way of reminding God’s people that they have been blessed to be a blessing.

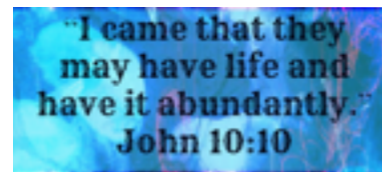
When I look around here I see a lot of people serving one another with their

¹ Available at <http://rickwarren.org/devotional/english/why-applying-scripture-is-so-tough>

gifts — our musicians sharing their musical talent, our AV/sound guys sharing their technology skills, our property dudes sharing their ability to build and fix things. Some of you have used your creative gifts to make beautiful banners, child-friendly spaces, and a fun youth room. Many of you give time and energy to provide delicious Sunday morning treats, Wednesday soup suppers, summer grill outs, bake communion bread and fill communion cups. Other share their time and energy cutting grass, packing food for Operation BackPack, teaching children, leading book discussions, assisting during worship, counting the offering. No matter how long I go on trying to list all the ways you bless others through the gifts and blessings you have received I would inevitably miss someone. That's one of the reasons we are having a Thanksgiving Brunch this morning. It is a small token of appreciation for all you do here to make this community of faith as welcoming, hospitable and loving as it is. It is also an invitation to continue doing what you are doing and/or perhaps to become involved for the first time in something new.

Many of you use your gifts to serve others outside the church too, at home, in your daily work and play, and in the volunteering that you do in the community. Every day in every interaction you have with other people you have the opportunity to do God's work with your hands. Serving one another with the gifts we have received is precisely how we love one another. Biblical love is not about the warm, fuzzy feelings we sometimes have for each other. Biblical love is choosing to act for the benefit of others even if — especially when — and in spite of the fact that they are a flawed, imperfect, messed up, broken sinners. Because that is how Christ loves us. What Christ sees in each of us is not a flawed, imperfect, messed up, broken sinner but a beautiful child of God, still in the process of growing and maturing into our true image-of-God selves.

[STEP 3] Today's Gospel lesson is Jesus' own commentary on his healing of a blind beggar. Jesus describes his purpose as being a gateway or a door to abundant life. As Jesus restores the blind beggar's eyesight he is literally saved from darkness. He is also saved from a life of social isolation and marginalization. Never again will he wonder where his next meal will be or who will answer his pleas as he sits begging outside the city. He will know the safety and security of community. As Christ's followers we are both in need of the abundant life of healing and reconciliation Christ gives, and we are simultaneously called to be doorways to abundant life for others: to provide companionship and help for the single parent and the widowed, acceptance and advocacy for the bullied teen, dignity and a chance at self-determination for those living in poverty, involvement in worthwhile causes for the rich and the retiree. That is what knowing, living, and sharing Christ is all about - being doorways to abundant life for each other and for our neighbors. Are we doing as well as we could with applying this biblical concept in our life as a church?





[STEP 4] This morning we heard the psalmist proclaim: the earth is Lord’s and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it.” We get the last part of this proclamation. Everyone who lives in this world belongs to God. We try our best to live that out here at St. Stephen’s by welcoming everyone — young and old, members and non-members, baptized and unbaptized at the Lord’s table. This concept is enshrined in our official welcome statement (printed in your bulletin) in which we commit ourselves to the full participation of all persons without exception regardless of age, race, gender

identity, sexual orientation, financial or family status, physical or mental abilities, or any other human distinction used to discriminate and exclude.

But how about the first part: the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it? Do we get what that means? Do we really understand that we are not owners of the world? That regardless of what the title deed says, we are not the owners even our own little corner of the world? Everything we are and everything we have comes first from God and ultimately belongs to God. We are only stewards to whom life, health, time, energy, talents, gifts, and material possessions have been entrusted for a finite number of years. As stewards we are called to a careful and responsible management of everything we are and have, not only for our own benefit, but for the purpose of being a blessing to others, of being doorways to abundant life for others.

Today is Consecration Sunday. We give thanks for the blessings we have received — life and health, time and energy, strengths and skills, talents and treasures. We commit ourselves to using those blessings to do Christ’s work in this place. We offer ourselves and our resources to building St. Stephen’s into a doorway to the abundant life Christ yearns to give us and all people.

Please pray with me:

God of abundance, you have poured out a large measure of earthly blessings: our table is richly furnished, our cup overflows, and we live in safety and security. Teach us to set our hearts on you and not on these material blessings. Keep us from becoming captivated by prosperity, and grant us the wisdom to use your blessings to be a blessing and a doorway to abundant life for others. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.