

Thank you Sara
for sharing your story
and for your explanation of the pledging process

Let us now be before God in prayer.
“Precious Lord, not my words but yours,
Not our thoughts but yours.
Capture our imaginations
and help us to see your will, your ways, and your kingdom.
Oh Lord our rock and redeemer. Amen”

Today, two very significant events in the life of our church collide.

First, as Sara mentioned, sometime in the next couple of days,
you will receive an invitation to take part in the financial stewardship of the
church.

For our finance and budget committee,
this is one of the highest Holy days in the life of the church.

This happening is coupled with today, being Reformation Sunday,
a day when we remember Martin Luther, a young monk in Germany,
nailing 95 theses to a church door in Wittenberg
and starting the Protestant Reformation.

John Buchanan, a leader in the Presbyterian Church reflects: *“Reformation
Sunday used to be the occasion when we sang Luther’s hymn ‘A Mighty
Fortress Is Our God’*

*and listened to the preacher criticize the Catholic Church
and tell everybody how wonderful it was to be a Protestant.*

Most churches don’t do that anymore, thankfully

*In fact, Luther’s hymn will be sung in a fair number of Catholic churches
this morning, and there is consensus mostly that the Protestant Reformation
was a necessity, but that Protestant churches turn out to be
no more perfect than the Catholicism from which they came.”¹*

¹ Buchanan, John, Description of the Reformation Sunday as expressed in “Called For” a sermon preached by Buchanan at Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago, IL, October 31, 2004.

As these important events in the life of the church, stewardship and Reformation Sunday intersect, I would like for us to focus on one question that might help us hold the two together in a creative tension.

Here is the question that I would like for us to consider today.

What does it mean to be entrusted with faith?
and entrusted with resources?

What does it mean to be a steward of faith and treasure?

Let me begin answering that question with a story about one of my favorite Presbyterians, Marj Carpenter.

Marj was a Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. She's traveled to over 100 countries and received a number of awards in journalism.

She described the Presbyterian Church in a story.

She was talking about our presence in Central America and she described a trip to Guatemala.

She notes that different denominations do fine work in Central America but Presbyterians have a really good record in Guatemala.

She was traveling with David Young a missionary in that region.

They went by jeep to a village that was nestled in the mountains.

When they arrived in the village, everyone ran.

Unlike Africa, where she said she was often greeted by children running to greet them, she was a bit taken back, by everyone scattering.

Marj asked her guide "What's wrong?"

And the guide said that a couple of weeks ago some of the farmers had gotten into trouble with the government and the military had just been through the town.

Some of the villagers were murdered and then buried in a large ditch at the edge of town.

As they were standing there, an elderly woman came by a fence, close enough to call out, but far enough away to run and she said: "Presbyteriano, Presbyteriano..."

It really bothered Ms. Carpenter; She thought:

"It's bad enough to run around the world looking North American let alone looking Presbyterian."

So she asked her:
How did you know we were Presbyterian?"

Her answer gets at what it means to be Presbyterian.
She said:

"Because the Presbyterians are the only ones who still come up here to help us!"

What does it mean to be a steward of faith and treasure?
Regardless of whether we are Presbyterian or Catholic,
it means we put our faith into action.
It means that when we see a need, and we respond.

That's why we go to the Dominican Republic.
That's why we go to the Gulf Coast.
That's why we go to Hartford.
And that's why we tutor at Hanoc.

Being good stewards of faith and treasure means we share what we have.
We share our resources and we share our faith.

But how do we share?

How do we share these things that are so precious and important?
A good answer to the question can be found in the Reformation.
One of the catch phrases of the Reformation is
"Reformed ... always reforming."
It means we have not figured everything out.
It means we are a people on a journey.
We are far from perfect.
So when we share our faith,
our ideas or our opinions,
we do so well aware that God's ways are not always our ways.
It means we approach people, who are different than us,
people of different religion, race, politics and orientation with great respect.
And into the world of mistrust, division and intolerance,
we seek to be humble ambassadors.

There is a reason for the oft told question and answer,

“What do you get when you cross a Presbyterian and a Jehovah’s witness?”

Answer: “Someone standing at the door with nothing to say.”

Because historically, we have understood that good stewards “listen first.”

We believe with Saint Francis of Assisi who said:

“Preach the gospel every day, if necessary use words.”

We share our faith and resources with humility.

This doesn’t mean good stewards don’t have opinions.

It doesn’t mean we don’t get involved.

We are still constantly asking:

“Where is Christ bidding us to go today?”

“What is God’s will for me this day?”

And this gets us into a lot of trouble.

It means we offer statements about foreign and domestic policy.

Sometimes we offer statements about divestment of investments in Israel,

Sometimes it is the war in Iraq,

and at other times the environment.

And often times our national church looks much like an old couple that has been quarreling all their lives.

I like that image of a quarrelling old couple as an image for a good steward.

It means that good stewards, no matter how old or tired we might feel, we still care enough to speak up.

Did you hear our New Testament lesson this morning?

Let me read it to you again, please note that I’ve taken a bit of editorial license.

The disciples and Jesus came to West Hartford

and a large crowd gathered to see the Board of Education building dismantled, the Clock tower removed, and a vast expanse behind the front door.

Bartimaeus son of Timaeus,

a man with no hope and no future, was sitting on the steps of the library when he saw that the traffic was caused by Jesus of Nazareth and not the fellow directing traffic.

He began to shout out and say,

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried even louder

as to be heard above the construction *and* the leaf blowers.

Jesus stood still and said:

“Call him here.”

And they called the blind man, saying to him:

“Get up, he is calling you.”

So throwing off his coat, he jumped over the rubble and came to Jesus.”

Jesus said:

“What do you want me to do for you?”

The blind man said:

“Teacher, let me see again.”

Jesus said to him:

“Your faith has made you well!”

And immediately, his eyes were opened.

This, somewhat modified version of the gospel lesson gets at the heart of stewardship.

Jesus says:

“Your **faith** has made you well.”

And when Jesus utters those words he says something that we are almost afraid to say it ourselves.

Why do we give generously to Westminster?

Why do we share our faith and our resources?

Because we believe that faith

is the beginning and source of all healing.

Many of you know that I grew up outside of Philadelphia.

What you don't know is two things about my high school that I'm not overly proud of.

First, my school, Harriton High school had the longest losing streak in the state's history, 62 games without a win. Impressive, I know.

Something else you don't know, in the seventies at Harriton High School on the Main Line, Disco was disproportionately popular.

I think there might have been a correlation between the two.

Into that disturbing mix of pop culture and adolescence I was trying to find my way, and somewhere along the way,

in the midst of Disco and low moral,

I wondered what on earth am I here for?

As a teen, is this it?

And thank God, I was in a church that took youth ministry seriously.

And I had a youth pastor and a church who cared about me enough to have me to have me look at the cross.

And somehow I got it.

I got that God loved the world so much that God would give his very own as a sign of god's great love for humanity.

"Faith saved my life!"

Why do I give generously to God's work at this church?

It's certainly not because we are perfect,
we're making mistakes all of the time.

It's not simply because I really like the staff
and the people that I get to work with.

Why did I give my life to this crazy enterprise called the church
and why do we give the lion share of our resources to Westminster,

because I believe that

"Faith is what makes one well."

Amen

Here are some images friends being stewards of faith!
(PowerPoint Presentation)