

Today is our kick-off Sunday for Stewardship—the time when we focus on how we give our time, talent, and treasure back to God. Stewardship is not just this one set of five weeks we begin today. Rather it's an all year round way of living. The Episcopal Church has a website called TENS (The Episcopal Network for Stewardship), and one has to be a member to use the multitude of resources available. ECCT has joined as a diocese, making these resources available to us as parishes. This year's theme is called *Journey to Generosity*. I really like the theme and believe wholeheartedly that stewardship is a journey to generosity. As our life experiences unfold, we discover more about ourselves and about God, and we learn a little more about how to respond to God in giving back. How to give back is an evolving process. Stewardship is not just about keeping lights on and heating our building and salaries being paid and caring for all that this community does and is. We are responsible to those important things *and* we are most accountable to living our lives as the Beloved.

Henri Nouwen says, “Put simply, life is a God-given opportunity to become who we are, to affirm our own true spiritual nature, claim our truth, appropriate and integrate the reality of our being, but most of all, to say ‘Yes’ to the One who calls us the Beloved.”

Jesus gathered the Beloved disciples around him and taught them how to be

that Beloved Community. He helped them see that they were loved beyond measure and taught them how to take that love out into their world. The teaching we have this morning in Matthew's Gospel is a precious example of that.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matt 5:2-12).

Yesterday in Bushnell Park I celebrated at *Church by the Pond* and engaged that community in conversation about which of these beatitudes touched them deeply or was a favorite for them. The conversation was rich and taught me as if I were sitting on that hillside in Galilee hearing them for the first time.

In this familiar Sermon on the Mount Jesus invites the disciples and us “to

hear and walk in the way of his will for our lives.” Jesus reminds them and us of a “journey to faithfulness. When he places us on that journey, he places us in the long line of those heroes *and heroines* who have gone on ahead of us.”<sup>1</sup> On this All Saints Sunday we remember by name those who have gone on to greater glory since last All Saints Day. I believe this day also calls us to remember all those upon whose shoulders we stand throughout time and especially in this holy place of Trinity. People have given of their time, talent, and treasure since 1875 so that we can enjoy the benefits of this beloved community today. We remember and we give thanks for them and are called to pay attention to the responsibility they pass on to us. It’s not a free pass we are given. We’re given a challenge to continue being and growing into the beloved community of Trinity, Collinsville, and to make this a sustained community for our children and grandchildren and all who will stand on our shoulders.

Jesus invites us to walk with him and to live our lives as the Beloved.

Bishop Jake Owensby of Western Louisiana says it well: “God invests in each of us the power to transform the world. When we devote our time, our spiritual gifts, and our financial resources to God’s dream of a just and peaceful creation, our energies feed the hungry, heal the sick, mend fractured relationships, and restore shattered lives. In other words, God works through our generosity to restore the

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<sup>1</sup> Earl F. Palmer in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Volume 4*, David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 238.

world.”<sup>2</sup>

This All Saints Sunday we’re called to ponder where we are on the journey to generosity and to consider taking a step forward and upward. Maybe it’s moving another step closer to tithing or finding a way to increase your giving because of God’s generosity to you in a particular way. Henri Nouwen says an important step on this journey of life is to say ‘Yes’ to the One who calls us the Beloved. That ‘Yes’ and Jesus’ teaching call us to sit with the beatitudes with some questions. How are we generous in our dealings with others? How are we generous when we welcome the stranger and the strange into our church home? How are we generous in our forgiveness and in our acceptance of forgiveness? How do we give thanks to one One who calls us the Beloved?

This morning your vestry invites you to a delicious breakfast as we continue on our journey to generosity. They and I thank you for all that you do and all that you are in this place. The breakfasts are an act of generosity from them. Whereas you will hear more about our “journey to generosity,” Trinity’s stewardship theme this year is “Passing the Plate”. The vestry has observed that not everyone touches the offering plate as it’s passed. Sometimes the ushers hold it for you. Some of you give electronically. Some of you do touch the plate as you pass it to a neighbor. We want everyone to pass the plate as a symbol of what we do together in this place on our journey to generosity. This journey is indeed about how we live our

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<sup>2</sup> Jake Owensby, “Exercising a Generous Power” in *Journey to Generosity*, All Saints Day.

lives as the Beloved. We're all invited to hop on to that journey and work together to be all that we're intended to be—"to hear and walk in the way of *Jesus*' will for our lives." That calls for a response from each of us.

The Ibo in Nigeria have a proverb that says, "it is the heart that gives; the fingers just let it go." I invite you to work on your heart and exercise your fingers!