

“For All That Has Been, Thanks...For All That Will Be, Yes”
Consecration Weekend
Sermon on 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24 (11/22 & 11/23/14)
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My younger sister, Christy, got married this past August to a wonderful guy named Jon. The first week I spent away from Bismarck after moving here in late June was the week surrounding my sister's wedding.

Christy and Jon are both students at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, and they got married in Dunnell, Minnesota, at the Lutheran church where my brother-in-law grew-up. The reception following the ceremony was at my brother-in-law's family farm...it was such a wonderful day!

My sister, for one, was a bit overwhelmed – and incredibly humbled – by just how many people spent time and money making the trek to their wedding...and, because it was in a teeny town, it really was something of a “destination wedding” that required people to make arrangements to stay in hotels in larger towns, many miles from the actual wedding and reception sites.

That so many of our family members – and so many of her friends – made a point to be there with them for their wedding meant the world.

Those of you who have gotten married, or who have experienced other major family events, may understand that humbling feeling of being surrounded by so many important people on days you know you will remember the rest of your life.

Of course, along with the humility and the sincere joy that naturally comes on days like a wedding day, the day my sister got married also brought with it the special brand of jitters and anxiety only a wedding day can bring. (Those of you who have gotten married may likely understand *those* feelings as well!)

The entire day of my sister's wedding was pure gift – love, joy, anticipation, jitters, and anxiety...*all of it* contributed to what became one of my family's favorite days so far. Period. And, in the minutes before the actual ceremony, the pastor who officiated said something I will never forget – something that has continued to come back to me over the last few months since the wedding.

The wedding party and immediate family were gathered in the basement of the church, waiting for the last, stragglng guests to be seated before walking up to process in. Pastor Paul Rhode – the campus pastor at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, where both my sister and brother-in-law went to college – offered a beautifully calming prayer with all of us just ahead of the ceremony's start.

I don't remember what Pastor Paul said during the prayer... but I *do* remember what he said before he *started* praying. Quoting Swedish diplomat and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Dag Hammarskjöld, Pastor Paul led us into pre-wedding prayer by saying this: "For all that has been, 'thanks'...and for all that will be, 'yes.'"

"For all that has been, 'thanks'...for all that will be, 'yes.'"

It's a practically perfect quote to offer just before a wedding, but it is abundantly appropriate *any* time...perhaps especially for us here, today, at McCabe United Methodist Church, as we worship God on this Consecration Weekend.

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Now, in any church, it can feel a little awkward when the "stewardship season" comes around. We're not supposed to talk about money in polite company, right? So stewardship time can feel awkward.

It can feel awkward for the folks who have long been part of the church, it can feel awkward for people who are newer to the church or who just happened to have walked in the door for the first time. And it can feel awkward for us preachers, too.

When we talk about stewardship in the church, we *mean* to talk about how we are called to be faithful stewards of *all* our resources: our time, our talent, *and* our treasure...but, so often, it feels like, when we focus on stewardship, we focus primarily on treasure – on money, on the stewardship of our finances. And, even more specifically, on *giving our money "to the church."*

To some people, when the pastor preaches about financial stewardship, it might feel like she or he is simply raising money for their own salary. To be completely honest, in my years of preaching about stewardship – and about giving, specifically – it has never even crossed my mind that I'm raising money for my own salary. Because stewardship is so much bigger than that.

Yes, my salary – and all of our church staff members' salaries – come out of your generosity...but, as staff, we, too, give of our time, our talent, our treasure. And we give not out of obligation, but out of a sense of thanks for all God has given us. We also give because we want to be part of what God is doing *here* – in and through this wonderful place.

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As a leader, I've been taught to model that which I want to see from those in the congregations I serve...I've been taught I can't expect anyone in my church to do something I'm not also willing to do myself.

This is about integrity and it so true.

Any of you who are leaders in any way – whether it's here at the church or in your job or in your family – any of you who are leaders know the truth of this. If you want people to follow, you have to “walk your talk,” as it were.

Well, since we are talking most specifically about *financial* stewardship here today, I have to be honest with you that I struggle a little bit every time we get to the offering in our weekly worship services.

And I have always struggled during the offering in any church where I've served as pastor: because, in some churches, I've only put something in the offering plate once a month...and in other churches – McCabe now being one of them – I hardly *ever* put anything in the offering plate.

To be clear, this is not because I do not give financially: I take the biblical tithe very seriously, so 10% of my salary goes right back into the church's General Fund. BUT...I only give once a month. In some churches, it's been one check per month, so I rarely put anything in the plate...and in other churches – again, like McCabe – I can give electronically, so I pretty much *never* put anything in the actual offering plate. //

It's funny, I recently was part of a pastoral training event about financial stewardship with Pastor Kermit Culver from up at Legacy United Methodist Church here in Bismarck. When we started talking about the offering time and feeling strange about either only putting a check in once a month or never putting money in because of automatic bank draft giving, Pastor Kermit shared that their staff had joked about having t-shirts made that said, “Don't judge me: I give electronically.”

Believe me, I've been tempted to have such a shirt made for myself! I love electronic giving because I love giving away money, but I hate writing checks...however, electronic giving doesn't really allow me to “model” what it looks like to be a leader who expects her church members to give of their time, their talent, *and* their treasure. But, I digress a little...

Like I said, stewardship is about so much more than just the giving of our financial resources.

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When thinking about the message for this Consecration Weekend, I couldn't help but think about today's Scripture reading from 1 Thessalonians chapter five...especially these key verses: “My friends ... Encourage anyone who feels left out, help all who are weak, and be patient with everyone. Don't be hateful to people, just because they are hateful to you. Rather, be good to each other and to everyone else.”

(Isn't that kind of what the church is all about???)

“Always be joyful and never stop praying. Whatever happens, keep thanking God because of Jesus Christ. This is what God wants you to do ... I pray that God, who gives peace, will make you completely holy.”

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When we give of our time, our talent, and our treasure, it's about saying “thank you” to the God who gives us life...“thank you” to the God who blesses us with forgiveness...“thank you” to the God who provides us opportunities to do meaningful work, whether it's our job or a volunteer position that brings us joy.

“For all that has been, thanks...”

And when when we look ahead to the coming year and think about how God is calling us to use our time, talent, and treasure, we are anticipating all that God will do in the future through this church community.

“...for all that will be, yes.”

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Just before the sermon, we sang the hymn “For the Fruits of This Creation.” And, even though we sang it together, I want you to again open your hymnals to page 97. This time we're going to speak the text together as a prayer leading us into our time of offering and consecration. So, please join with me in speaking these words...

“For the fruits of this creation, thanks be to God;
for good gifts to every nation, thanks be to God;
for the plowing, sowing, reaping, silent growth while we are sleeping,
future needs in earth's safe-keeping, thanks be to God.

“In the just reward of labor, God's will is done;
in the help we give our neighbor, God's will is done;
in our worldwide task of caring for the hungry and despairing,
in the harvests we are sharing, God's will is done.

“For the harvests of the Spirit, thanks be to God;
for the good we all inherit, thanks be to God;
for the wonders that astound us, for the truths that still confound us,
most of all, that love has found us, thanks be to God.”¹

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¹ Text by Fred Pratt Green.

When my sister and brother-in-law got married, this hymn was actually the recessional at the end of the ceremony and it was a wonderful way to celebrate what had just happened.

The congregation stood and we all sang as my sister and new brother-in-law walked out of the sanctuary and as those of us in the wedding party followed close behind. The last two lines seemed especially fitting: "For the wonders that astound us, for the truths that still confound us, most of all, that love has found us, thanks be to God."

"Most of all, that love has found us, thanks be to God."

"For all that has been, thanks...for all that will be, yes."

As we now move into our time of offering and consecration, I invite you to come forward.

Please come forward if you have a monetary offering and / or an Estimate of Giving card to bring. Monetary offerings will go in the plates near the front pews...and Estimate of Giving cards are to be placed on the altar rail.

Even if you have neither to bring today, please feel free to come forward anyway. Pray at the altar. Ask God to open your heart and mind that you might sense how you are being called to give back through your time, your talent, and your treasure. Because God calls us all.

May our prayer this day truly be: "For all that has been, thanks...for all that will be, yes." Amen.