

“Stewardship”

Micah 3:5-12; 1 Thess. 2:9-13; Matthew 23:1-12

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When I was quite a bit younger I got interested in backpacking. And as I began to get ready those first few times, I would go to a shop or look at the magazine and there always seemed to be one or two more things that would be so helpful if I took them along. So by the time I actually ended up going back packing, the pack was pretty heavy and I found that my journey was curtailed because I tried to take too much with me.

Perhaps Jesus is talking about something like that when he is talking about the scribes and Pharisees. Some of the things they were saying were good but it was a little like they were salesmen in the backpacking store asking you to take everything at once instead of finding what you needed for the particular trip you were going on.

We recognize we can't do everything at once. We have a limit to what we can do, that we have to begin to discern, what's priority, what do we need to do. There's that temptation however, to let whoever is advising us to just tell us how to do things, to guide us, to give us the way. There's two sides of that that I want to talk about.

One is when we do that, we begin to give over our own abilities to respond to do things to someone else. And Jesus, I think, is encouraging us not to do that, to notice that there are all kinds of people out there who would be instructors, who would be authorities in our lives, to tell us what to do. But there's a couple dangers in that. One is, it's a little bit like working at a place where what you do all day is put in one particular rivet and you put it in time after time after time. Because if we just listen for one particular way of understanding, that's all we're going to ever have. But just like that company that does one thing, sure we're producing something, but are we allowing the people doing the work to be more than a machine? Jesus, I think, is telling us that we're not automatons. We don't just do the same thing; we don't just listen to the scribes and Pharisees. There is more to us and we can begin to find divisions and struggles. There has to be some discernment on our part. We have to listen. It's not only what Apollos said, or Paul, or Norman or Tartuffe I don't know how many of you know who Tartuffe is but if you go to see the play that is running right now on campus you'll find out. The play by Moliere is about a guy who talks religiously about religion and how good he is as a way of manipulating a family into doing what he wants them to do.

We also have to do some discernment to find where the Tartuffes are in our lives and where they're not. This is an age old problem. Just look at our reading of Micah. There were all kinds of prophets and they had to discern which prophet spoke for God. Now it's a little easier for us to look back and see that Micah was consistent, that he fit into the trajectory of history. But what do we do today? How do we discern God's word for us?

Paul talks about what a good of guy he was when as he came to tell these people about God's good news. So was that the reason they should listen to him because he was a good guy, or at least he said he was? It's not enough for somebody to be a "good guy" for us to listen to them. There's some discernment we need to do. How do we check? One of the things I all ready mentioned. Is it consistent with Scripture over time? Can we see where it fits into God's work and will? And then the very word Gospel. Is it "gospel" - that is "good news"? Jesus comes he brings good news of God's grace. So as we begin to

listen and hear, as Paul talks those Thessalonians “are seeing the Good News in what he said”. Now Paul may not have gotten in the way with his attempts to be a good person, but what really got to the people was hearing and experiencing the grace of God through what he had to say. As we listen and hear, it’s up to us to discern. Just like that person working in the factory, God did not call us to be automatons. God made us people who can do things, who can think who can act. God made us response-able. We are able to respond to what God does in our lives. We’re able to respond to what God’s word tells us. We’re able to respond to how the grace of God enters our lives. And we’re not to find the scribes and Pharisees that are going to tell us how to respond all the time. Our scribes and Pharisees might tell us that we’re all supposed to come up and sing a solo. Now that might be fine for some of us, but it wouldn’t work for all of us. It helps if we can sing!

God knows we are each unique, that we each have our own kind of response, our way of responding. The calling is to lead a life worthy of God, as Paul talks about it in Thessalonians. That life, worthy of God is going to take on its own shape depending on who each of us is. God made each of us to be different.

When I first started going backpacking with my family, I carried a lot more than Ames did. Well that’s not the way it is anymore. Things change and our lives change; the way we live for God changes. It’s a gift God gives us, that we are made people who can respond, that we are able to respond to God, we’re response-able, so that in our responding as we begin to follow Christ and see His grace at work in our lives, we become responsible citizens of the kingdom. It is because we are able to respond to God that we have a sense of responsibility. If we can allow ourselves to remain humble as Christ encourages us to be, we can continue to hear how he leads us.

So it’s a matter of listening and discerning and doing what God calls us, leading a life worthy of God, into the kingdom to share God’s glory is the way it’s described in Thessalonians. It really is a re-action to, a response to God’s grace that we give our lives, we follow Jesus, we begin to gather together because God has called us together as a family of faith, we begin to live into that family, studying together, worshiping together, having fellowship together, caring for one another, expending the currency of God’s grace with each other. But not only does God then call us to follow, and as we begin to gather and begin to know who we are as a family of faith, an interesting thing begins to happen as well. Not only does God call us to gather, he sends us. God sends us to be his ambassadors to the world, whether its to Pearlington, or Africa or Genesee or the Food Bank, or be a Stephen Minister or a deacon or simply bring food when someone needs it or go to the coffee shop at the right time for someone in need. God sends us into each other’s lives and into the world’s life.

This response-ability is really what we’re talk about when we say stewardship because it’s recognizing that we can respond to the wonder of God’s love and grace with our lives, our time, our talent, our resources. That’s what this whole stewardship season is about, recognizing we can respond to God, thinking about how we can do that, pledging ourselves to do that and then living it out, becoming God’s family together. It’s really a gift that God gives us, the ability to respond to his grace, to be his people, to find the fellowship and worship and study that we do together, the growing in Christ, and to be sent into the world to spread God’s love, that’s stewardship. That’s our calling. Amen.