

1 Corinthians 12:4-12

Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by:

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Called to Care: Three Personal Perspectives

“Dum Vivimus Servimus” Are We Up for It?

By Fred Oliver

So, where does the sense of stewardship begin in our lives? Where does the “called to caring” seed get planted that grows as you live your life and move from one phase to the next? What and where influenced it to grow? I’m sure many of us have our unique stories and pathways on personal Stewardship that started when we were young and continues into our older ages.

As for me, here is one of my milestones along the way. Some of you know that I attended a college named Presbyterian College - a respected private Southern liberal arts college. Yes, it even has a football team - the fighting BLUE HOSE, the socks alleged to have been worn by Scottish warriors, (show the socks) but let’s just say, our team never won the national championship. However, we actually played the CAL Bears once in September of 2011 in PacBell park while Strawberry Field was under renovation - it was a slaughter, 63 to 11, but we had great seats, and lots of sympathy from Bear fans sitting next to us.

In hearing about my school people unfamiliar with my college would say to me, “Yes, but what is its real name,” and I say, “that is its real name.” PC was founded as a part of a growing number of colleges supported by regional churches throughout the South - PC is in Clinton, South Carolina and was founded by the local Presbyterian Church in 1880. Its enrollment has remained for years about 1,000 students, and it continues to draw students looking for a smaller college experience. I met my wife Lizanne there, sang in the choir, got paid to lead a pep band, even was paid to run the auditorium sound system for assemblies (don’t get any ideas back there in the corner) and basically evolved into an adult - and then launched out into the world with five years in the Army.

The reason I tell you this story about PC is that it answers part of the question I raised about seeds of Stewardship - when and where. For me, my four year experience at PC was with outstanding personal professors, friends, engaging programs and organizations assisting me into seeing and feeling what true Stewardship is about and what it can achieve.

Back to my sermon title - The school motto is in Latin; on the school's logo is engraved "dum vivimus servimus," which translates to "While We Live, We Serve." (repeat). The latin word for "live" carries two meanings; one is while we are alive, breathing air on this earth, but the second meaning is richer, to LIVE, is to be fully engaged with our God given purpose all around us during our time on this earth. The servimus part, it is not a reflection - it's a command. In gratitude for God's grace to us - we serve - we are called to serve ourselves, our families, our friends, strangers along the way, and the world around us. For sure, many students going through PC with me ended up in lifetime serving professions - ministerial, teaching or medical. The tone of my schooling experiences leant me and others towards being adult leaders who would enable and practice "dum vivimus servimus" in all aspects of living. So, I guess it stuck . . . as I look back.

To be sure, Christ directed Stewardship to be a responsibility, and a response, to the trust and goodness God has bestowed on us. Stewardship is about responding and being a part of making the dreams of God come true.

Taken from [Luke 12:48] Jesus advised, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of them, shall be much, required."

As the people of Stone Church, may our personal Stewardship reflect what we have been given, and may we respond in a serving spirit of joy and love.

Amen

Why I Give

By Todd Davidson

Good morning! Well, I now know with 100% certainty that it's true that the Presbytery and our congregation are open and welcoming to all comers ... I'm the living proof that they'll really let anyone up here ...

I say this as a late-comer to faith and service. My journey was a bit longer, with a few more twists and turns, than Fred's. Aside from some occasional volunteering as a young adult, my giving spirit took hold more gradually as I climbed the rungs of the lifetime ladder — meeting my wife, having kids and beginning to build a nest for my own family. As I began to reflect on my own good fortune, I started to open my eyes to those dealt a hand that looked nothing like mine, with my two college-educated, credit-worthy parents who supported me in every way, including with college tuition and a share of the down payment on our first home.

In Matthew 13:1-9, Jesus speaks in parables of a sower whose seed meets many fates: Some seed fell on the path, and birds came to eat it. Some fell on rocky ground with little soil, left exposed to the sun and scorched. Some fell among the thorns, where it was choked as the thorns grew. But some fell in rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirty fold.

This is a parable about us. We are the seed. Jesus has sown us into the world facing different and profound challenges to thriving ... it isn't easy to put down roots and grow if you land on hard soil not receptive to your arrival, or on thorns certain to snuff out any chance you might have for a good life. Realizing this simple truth of the inherent inequality in our world has been a huge driver of my giving.

The American ideal is that everyone has an equal seat at the table of opportunity. But this ideal can only be realized if we create the conditions for all of us to grow and thrive. Consider a few troubling facts:

Today's federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour has actually decreased by around 20% since 1950, when the higher increase to the cost of living in that time period is taken into account. If wages were tied to productivity increases — meaning how much workers produce each hour — in that same period since 1950, the minimum wage would be \$22.18 per hour.

The price of education and health care are also on a multi-decade increase, with education up around 250% and health care up around 180%. And remember: Incomes have barely increased. Jobs requiring a college degree have more than doubled. 35% of ALL jobs now require a college education. So as higher education becomes ever more important, it has also become ever less accessible.

In 1970 we had nearly half a million psychiatric in-patient beds. By 2014 that number had been reduced to well below 200,000 beds. Today, more than half a million people are homeless every night. About a fifth suffer from severe mental illness. Another fifth suffer from chronic substance abuse. And here in Santa Clara County, a study last year concluded a renter would need to earn \$46.21 per hour to afford the average rental price of over \$2,400 per month — or around 3 times as much as the minimum wage depending on each city's minimum.

Immigration is at an all-time high of nearly 4% of the entire global population. That's about 300 million migrants, not that far below the entire US population.

These are a few painful examples of social injustice in action. I admit they're a bit discouraging, and motivate my giving in a somewhat negative way, in that they're about doing what I can to mitigate the injustice and inequality we all see every day.

But there's another motivator for me to give, and it's a really simple and real joyous one: I feel really good when I give! Really good!

I also believe that giving in support of the world we seek to create is not simply a question of living one's faith, or one's moral code. Pastor Timothy Keller writes that "Christians cannot simply preach the gospel. Those who avoid all political discussions and engagement are essentially casting a vote for the social status quo." Let our voices, and our actions, and our giving, guide the politics toward the most just and bountiful outcomes for all.

Why I Give

By Jody Meacham

Fred and Todd are two people whose reasons for giving to Stone Church are similar, yet still different. If you think about your own reasons for giving to Stone in the past, or why you're considering giving in the future, you probably find parts of their stories that ring true to you as well.

But parts. Not completely.

Among those in this room — this sanctuary — and among those who are worshiping with us today from home on Zoom or Facebook, each of our reasons for giving is unique. None fits exactly with any other.

Where they overlap is the institution to which we write a check or volunteer some time or put a personal skill or talent to work. There is something here that we believe in and care enough about for us to tangibly contribute to help it succeed.

For Emily and me, the unique mix of comfort and challenge we found at Stone Church is why we are in San Jose.

We didn't come to San Jose for that. We found it accidentally in our lengthy trial-and-error church search.

We came to this city for the reason many of you did: to pursue life and career goals that we thought were best realized by packing the moving van in our home state of North Carolina.

But when — in the not-distant future — Emily joins me in retirement, the friends we have made over 30-plus years in this church community are the reasons we want to stay here, despite the obvious financial incentives to pack another moving van.

Those friendships formed early in our time here because, as Derk mentioned a few weeks ago, Stone Church's tradition is to offer opportunities to serve in meaningful roles almost as soon as you walk through that door. That's not true in many congregations like the ones we grew up in.

Emily was elected an elder early on. Almost immediately she was in Session meetings where the elders were discussing whether to invite a guest pastor to speak to us. The pastor was facing a Presbyterian legal challenge to block her hiring at a church back East because she was gay.

Holy cow!

We no longer were in a religious culture focused on discovering the long lost magic math formula for 5 loaves, 3 fishes and 5,000 people.

We were in a church that was grappling with issues that affected people we knew, could see and talk to in our present day. People trying to raise children in a world that wanted to banish them.

You want to be *good* people? Stone Church was saying be good *to* people.

You want to follow Jesus Christ? Stone was saying imagine the path he would take in a real, today-world full of the moral challenges 21st Century society. It was refreshing. It was inspiring.

Let that inspiration fill you the way it filled Bill Ribble when he learned that the kids he tutored at Willow Glen High School were couch surfing at night. Bill dreamed of a permanent place they might lay their heads.

Let the children who sit at the foot of these steps on Sunday mornings — eager to learn something new from Mary Jo — inspire your curiosity about how we can be and do better within these buildings to support and teach each other.

Let the stories from hungry and homeless people that Emily and others cooked for — but more important, sat and ate meals with when we hosted rotating shelters — inspire the way we respond to need in our community.

Why do I give to Stone? I give because I've gotten so much from Stone.