

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

“Why I Make Sam Go to Church”

October 9, 2011

The October stewardship series leads us to reflect on the vows we take when we become members of the church. The pastor asks, *As members of this congregation, will you faithfully participate in its ministries by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service and your witness?* And we say, *I will*. Last week Rev. Croy opened up the subject of *our prayers* in a deep and meaningful way. This week—our presence. Not like birthday presents, but attendance, showing up, being here.

There’s a certain irony to preaching about the importance of being present in church to those who are, well, already present in church. But there’s always the hope that you who are present will share the message with some who are not. And let’s be honest—every crowd of people in church includes some people, maybe quite a few people, who almost didn’t come. Who seriously considered staying in bed, or not making the kids come after all, or worshipping with the *Sunday Times* or encountering God in nature (that is, playing eighteen holes). Did you know that there are Sundays when even the preacher thinks longingly of such things?

We have pledged to faithfully participate in the ministries of the church by our *presence*, by being here. There are, I would say, three main reasons people give for not coming to church regularly:

- Too busy. The job, the second job, school, soccer, dance, T-ball, Scouts, housework, the camper, TV shows . . . well, there's always something. Too busy.
- Don't get anything out of it. Not being fed.
- Being part of a church is demanding and stressful. They're always wanting me to *do* something. And did you know there are people at church who say insensitive things or rub you the wrong way? Who needs that?

Wow—maybe I won't come either! But there are also, I would say, three main reasons people do come to church:

- Someone makes them (kids), or at least puts pressure on them (husbands). More on that in a minute.
- They're lonely, need a hug or someone to talk to, looking for love and care.

- And because once in a while, like nowhere else, God shows up. It's like a window opens and Jesus speaks straight to you and holds your heart in his hands.

We have pledged to faithfully participate in the ministries of the church by our *presence*. Now, I could stand up here and explain things to you. I know why it's important to be in church. And so do you. And so, probably, do those who aren't here. The trouble is, explaining it doesn't really help. So instead let me tell you a story. It's a chapter from a book by Anne Lamott. The book is *Traveling Mercies*—I recommend it to you, with the warning that the language gets a little, uh, salty in places. And the chapter is called “Why I Make Sam Go to Church.” (Sam, you'll figure out, is Anne's elementary-age son.)

And this is the story stool. It was given to me by my first church. When I was ordained, that church was asked to make for me a red stole. But one woman misunderstood and said, “A red *stool*? Why are we supposed to make him a red stool?” So I was the only one in my ordination class to receive not only a red stole, but also a red stool. And ever since, I drag it out from time to time when I have a story to tell. We have pledged

to faithfully participate in the ministries of the church by our presence. The story is called "Why I Make Sam Go to Church."

See *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith* by Anne Lamott, pages 99-105.