

Stewards of Grace Commitment Sunday, November 7, 2021

1 Peter 4: 8-11

⁸ *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.* ⁹
Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ *Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.* ¹¹ *If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.*

Thank you, friends, for your song, for Quinton for composing it. This is a day to think about gifts. I had never encountered that passage from 1 Peter before, "*that each of us should use whatever gift we have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.*" Gifts, grace, service.

Many years ago, I was visiting churches and for awhile there, every church I visited was having Commitment Sunday, It was very irritating. I felt like that hero of the movie *Groundhog Day*, there must be a lesson I'm supposed to learn here, but I don't want to! I was moved by one's sermon about how everything comes from God and how all we are asked to give back is one tenth of that.

Yes, but all these churches were poor, I thought. I would look around and see church folks that had almost nothing, and wonder: how on earth can these people keep this place going I felt for those pastors how could they bear to ask the people to give. Its impossible, I thought to myself. But its always been rather impossible.

From the ancestors who were enslaved in Egypt to those persecuted peoples of faith who crossed the wilderness of desert or ocean, or attacks from jealous national leaders who suppressed the early church including Peter's. The church has always been in peril. The peril now is different, We are outposts in a world that seem increasingly disconnected to a sense of the holy, to the Sabbath and sees us as quaint to center our lives in something which we cannot prove but only live. And yet the church persists you keep showing up, doing the work of faith, teaching the children, guiding the youth, loving our elders feeding the hungry, caring for the homeless, reaching out to the refugee; taking unpopular stands for the sake of Christ's gospel. And we support this place, this church you are figuring out how you can do so. That's not to say its easy making commitments of time and resources. While we know in our hearts that God has

brought us this far, we confess that we struggle to be sure that God will keep doing so. There's an extraordinary story about that in the first Book of Kings in the Hebrew scriptures. There is a drought on, and the prophet Elijah hears the spirit of God tell him to go into a region where there has been no rain, and visit a widow there, whom God has told to feed him. And Elijah goes and finds the widow and asks her for a morsel of bread and she says, and she says, *as the Lord your God lives* (you hear that, "your God") she is not of the faith.

As your God lives I have nothing baked, just a handful of meal and a little oil, and I am now gathering a couple of sticks so that I might make something for myself and my son so we can eat and then die. And then he asks, outrageously and without apology, *Go and make a little cake for me from the meal and bread and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.* Now, how can this man bear to ask this woman, on the verge of starvation, for her last bit of food? But then he makes a promise Elijah makes a promise to her from the God who sent him: *“You will not run out of oil and meal. The jars will stay full until the drought is over.”*

The Lord will provide. And it was so. Elijah helped her realize, even in her poverty that she had and would receive gifts that would allow her to give. as Peter would say to the persecuted early church: What grace has brought you safe thus far, In what forms has grace come to you? Can you trust that grace that has brought you safe thus far, will lead you home? Can you release your life to that grace? And to the offering that God is calling forth from you? Think of the Saints we encountered this past season. How they felt a call, in very different ways, at different ages.

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Francis was in his 20's, Julian was in her 30's, Hildegard her 40's, Oscar was in his 60's when the service that was required of them became clear and each given strength to carry it out. Perhaps they, like we, were leaning on these words of Peter: There is a woman who lives a good portion of her life here well, on our grounds, she is without another home, so she spends her days walking through Clintonville. Eats her meals from our blessing box and at night, shuttles between here and the post office boxes. If you would arrive very early on a Sunday morning even on the coldest mornings, you would find her huddled against the door trying to get a bit of the warm air under the door. She can be difficult, she can take advantage, but then last Sunday morning, at worship time, she came inside,

and handed Cathy Davis a wad of money. *“Here, this is for the church.”* Perhaps because she has come to trust that she has a place to sleep, even a cold one, *“If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.”* That there will be food in the blessing box. According to the gifts she has been given she gave her last coins her morsel of meal and oil as a faithful steward of the grace she has received. That was the lesson those pastors and poor folk in those churches were trying to teach me in those Commitment Sundays all those years ago.

All of us, have received gifts of God and all of us are stewards of that grace. May we help one another to remember and be thankful in Jesus' name.

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