

A MINUTE FOR STEWARDSHIP - given in Worship, Oct. 27th

The fifth chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians contains one of the Apostle's most alarming admonitions. By way of background, a member of that church is openly having an affair with a woman who is not his wife, and the church knows it and is doing nothing about it. Paul's instructions are shockingly harsh – at first blush even savage. That church is to “hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” “Hand over to Satan?” “Destruction of the flesh?” Good heavens, what is Paul telling the Corinthians to do to this guy? Well, actually, nothing. They're not to affirmatively harm him in any way; only to release him from that church's embrace. All Paul says is that the man cannot be a part of that community of believers. Which means all that “hand over to Satan” and “destruction of the flesh” stuff is what Paul believes are the inevitable consequences simply of being without the care, the compassion, and the community of that church and presumably any other church. Presumably even our church. Really? Really? Are we supposed to take Paul seriously? Could this man's loss of that church's fellowship really be as catastrophic as Paul predicts? How irrational! How primitive! How ridiculous! Can we actually believe that?

I do. And I wonder if, at its core, perhaps you believe that, too. So, let me ask you. To those of us who have walked one of Life's dark valleys – dealing with some sort of challenge, or illness, or loss – and found our way through only because of the care, the compassion, and the community of Northridge, how “irrational” does Paul sound to you?

Imagine that experience without this church's prayers; without its meals; without the cards from the deacons; the pastor visits; its preaching and teaching and music; the calls, emails and letters from your friends here. How “primitive” does Paul sound to you? And imagine, whether you've walked one of those dark valleys or simply are wise enough to know someday you surely will, imagine making your way through without the silent, unshakeable assurance that this community of faith was somehow bearing your burdens, somehow walking beside you. How “ridiculous” does Paul sound to you? No, Paul's word choice is shockingly unfamiliar to us, but not his understanding. We have seen it, we have felt it, and we know it, all right here at Northridge.

Today begins our Stewardship season. For me, it's the occasion to ask myself what Northridge means to me, what it does, why it matters. And, more specifically, what it means when I pledge to support Northridge, instead of simply giving throughout the upcoming year or, perhaps, not giving at all.

Well, obviously, pledging, at its most basic, maintains the vibrancy of this church and its ministries, all of which are critical to continuing the precious guidance and nurturing Northridge provides each of us. For surely the church that leads us and feeds us, also needs us. Pledging is our response to that need in Northridge. But, more importantly, pledging responds to a need in us. It is an incident of discipleship. There is a profound theological difference between pledging and simply putting money in the plate. Pledging confers an intentionality to our giving, and

thereby transforms our giving into a truly spiritual practice – something we do regularly and deliberately, on par with prayer and worship. By making this covenant about our giving, we reaffirm our covenant with God, our covenant with Northridge, our covenant with one another. Now don't misunderstand me, reaching into our wallets on Sunday and placing part of what's there in the offering plate is certainly a good thing. It says "I am here for Northridge." But the covenant we make by pledging says all that and so much more. Pledging says "I am here for Northridge. And I will be here for Northridge." That theological difference – how our covenant to pledge addresses a need in us – is so important that every single one of our current and incoming deacons and elders has already committed to pledge in the campaign that begins right now. They would not ask their fellow Northridge Saints to do what they do not do themselves. Friends, there are a million-billion dark things that may happen in the year ahead that we cannot possibly now know. But there is one luminous thing that we can. Namely, that Northridge will be there for us. Let's pledge that we will be there for Northridge.

– *Frank Stevenson, on behalf of the Stewardship Task Force*

A MINUTE FOR STEWARDSHIP - given in Worship, Nov. 3rd

Good morning. It's my privilege to share a few thoughts today as we continue in this stewardship season and prepare to demonstrate our commitment to this church.

A Stewardship Campaign is all about giving. From the business that I'm in—building support for the work of nonprofits—I've had a chance to see a campaign or two. They usually involve two things. Current gifts that meet a need today. And, pledges for continued gifts in the future that you can count on to meet the needs of tomorrow. Both are significant. But, there's something exceptionally special about a pledge. It gives you the ability and confidence to move forward in planning and in making important things happen.

This past week, I had a chance to spend some time at the brand-new Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum downtown. It tells the facts of the Holocaust story, while also distilling the lessons from that and other horrific examples of genocide to constructively apply those lessons to how we deal with hatred and violence in our culture today. The museum was previously 6,000 square feet, but now is housed in an amazing state-of-the-art facility that's more than 55,000 square feet. It offers an incredibly powerful, timely experience that is so desperately needed in our world. The new museum cost many millions of dollars, far beyond the resources of the small nonprofit that runs it. So, how did they create it?

The answer is on the wall that lists the names of donors for the museum, many of whom are Holocaust survivors and family members themselves who are determined to help foster a new

generation of people empowered to stand up against evil. They've made wonderful current gifts; although, not enough to build and run the new museum. But, they've also made pledges. They've made commitments; they've made promises—that the museum and the community can count on their future financial support. In reliance on those pledges, the museum has now risen from the earth, opened its doors and begun its important work to combat hatred and indifference. The pledges of those Holocaust Museum donors demonstrate their faith in its mission.

In the context of our church, part of what's special about a pledge is the way that it also demonstrates our faith in God. I don't know what will happen tomorrow. I don't know what resources may be needed in the form of friendship, moral support, extra financial support or physical support. But, I do know that God urges us not to worry. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminded the disciples that if God knows and cares for the birds in the air, he certainly will provide for each of us. So in fact, making a pledge to support Northridge is actually an expression of trust. More than simply offering words about our faith in God, it's a tangible demonstration of our faith that God will provide for us.

The writer of Ecclesiastes, chapter 11, tells us to be generous in the act of giving, confident that the investment of those resources will be multiplied in return. When we invest in Northridge, the dollars are multiplied through the hands and hearts of the very people who sit beside you as the body of this church. To be there for our community. And, to be there for you.

On November 24, please join me in making a pledge for the year ahead to support Northridge. Together, we can demonstrate our collective faith in what God has in store for our church, and financially empower the many things that need to happen through its ministry and missions.

Northridge will be there for us.

We will be there for Northridge.

– Brent Christopher, on behalf of the Stewardship Task Force

A MINUTE FOR STEWARDSHIP - given in Worship, Nov. 10th

Good Morning. It's Stewardship time once again.

Sometimes we find that word a little intimidating. Sometimes we even dread this time of year because we know that word – STEWARDSHIP - will be coming around at church once again. Sound familiar?

But, what exactly IS stewardship? First of all, stewardship is NOT fundraising. Stewardship is a gift of oneself, an expression of our gratitude – AND, it doesn't come easy.

Stewardship is a learned discipline that over time becomes a spiritual practice. Remember when our offering plates used to be passed with only a few of us dropping in even one coin? Then one day our children called attention to our empty plates! Now, as the Northridge offering plates are passed up and down the aisles they are full of dollar bills because we, as a congregation, developed a new spiritual practice.

The word Stewardship is full of meaning –AND it happens every single day, all year long! It's how we spend our time, how well we care for our bodies, how we minister to others, how we use our talents and skills. Stewardship is what we do for those outside these walls AND for those sitting in the seat next to you. It's how we support those in our world who are in need, how we care for our environment, how we practice our faith every day of our lives, and YES, how we use our money.

This church has been a powerful presence in my life. We have shared so much together, AND, we have much to share in the future. The year 2020 will be a turning point in our church history. Let's make TRUE Stewardship synonymous with Northridge Presbyterian Church in 2020! You can help do that by practicing stewardship in your every day life, AND by choosing to pledge to our Northridge budget on November 24th. The future of Northridge depends on ALL of us working together AND supporting this church that we love so dearly!

Thank you.

Carolyn Henson, on behalf of the Stewardship Task Force

A MINUTE FOR STEWARDSHIP - given in Worship, Nov. 17th

Good morning. It is a privilege to speak to you during our Season of Stewardship. Luke, Chapter 12, Verse 48 tells us "... to whom much has been given, much will be required ...".

Our family has received an abundance of gifts from Northridge since we joined almost 30 years ago. Our daughters, Kate & Meg, were baptized into this loving and faithful community... and this community continues to embrace them when they travel home from Washington, DC and San Francisco. Northridge will always be their home. The stability young people derive from knowing they are a part of a nurturing community guides them to navigate their formative years with confidence and a giving spirit toward others.

Kate is almost 32 and Meg will be 30 in a couple of weeks – their spiritual journeys started here and, the gifts they were given by Northridge are the most important gifts of their lives. For that, we are filled with gratitude.

They received the gift of learning God's Word at a very early age from many dedicated teachers. Mike Buchanan expanding their biblical knowledge via competitive games of Jeopardy in the senior high Sunday School class remains a highlight. They received the gift of loving childcare from our sweet Anna – who recently retired.

They received the gift of music from Becca Rooney and Grady Coyle leading them in the precious children's choirs – just like Bryan and Suzanne continue to do with your children. They received the gift of joy when their beloved music teacher from the Children's Center, Debbie Ezell, gave them a special hug each Sunday morning.

They received the gift of showing compassion to those less fortunate through the annual Youth Mission Trips. The incredible dedication of MerriLee to our youth and the excellent leadership of Youth Director, Emily Cox provide this gift to your children today. Kate & Meg received the gift of lifelong friendships they continue to nourish today – despite geographic distances.

Most importantly, they received the gift of belonging to this compassionate and generous community. For these and so much more, Rob and I are filled with gratitude for the many gifts our family has received from Northridge.

As you make your Stewardship Pledge next Sunday, please take time to reflect on the gifts YOU AND YOUR FAMILY have received from this church family. I'm confident that you, too, will be filled with gratitude and appreciation for how much you have been given. And, remember Luke's words "... and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be expected."

Northridge has been and will continue to be there for us. We will be there for Northridge.

Anne Raymond, on behalf of the Stewardship Task Force

A MINUTE FOR STEWARDSHIP – given in Worship, November 24th

Stewardship Moment – 11/24/19 The last time I had the privilege to speak to you about Stewardship, I was 18 years old. I gave an impassioned speech comparing Northridge to a beloved dog—which if you’ve seen my Instagram, you know is a compliment of the highest order. Ten years later, when preparing for this speech, I discovered that my father was not a huge fan of that metaphor...So, dad I think I fixed it: So, Northridge is like a bird. Kidding. Today is the culmination of our formal stewardship campaign and the dedication of our pledges. I’d like to talk about an aspect of stewardship that I believe needs to be emphasized more consistently throughout our church experience—sacrificial giving. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus asked his followers to give up their earthly possessions in order to fully follow him. A great example is found in the book of Mark—"The Widow’s Offering" Mark chapter 12 verses 41-44 say, "He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'" Now, don't worry—I'm not asking you to sell all your earthly possessions, or even give up your new Disney+ subscription. But giving out of abundance is not what Jesus taught. Faith, and following Christ, should not be comfortable—including financially. In an age of the "Buy Now" feature, where materialistic distractions have never been more accessible, I urge you to consider sacrificial giving on a small, daily scale. I'm going to ask you to do something very un-Presbyterian and ask for your participation. Please raise your hand if you: -- Eat out for lunch more than one day a week; order food to be delivered more than once a month, or buy coffee from a coffee shop? Going forward, when you spend your money, please consider if purchases like those could instead be given sacrificially: pack your lunch one day a week, or meal prep; get coffee at the office or your home; or the hardest one for me--wear the clothes that are actually in your closet Before you know it—these small sacrifices add up. For example, going out to lunch costs roughly \$10 per meal. If you sacrificed going out to lunch one day a week, that \$40 a month. That totals an additional \$480 a year for your pledge. Surely, we can all agree that when you're putting a burger and fries up against Northridge and our faith—we know Northridge wins out. Another example is those of who made sacrifices for Mark and me over the last couple months as I recovered from surgery. The community and support we felt, with your meals, your cards, and well wishes, from some of you whom I know well—and some of you I hope to know better—means the world to us. We can and must be intentional in achieving

sacrificial giving, and if we are, we may find it's not as much of a sacrifice as we initially thought. Why it's so important for our church—How many of you have been present for a baptism? When someone gets baptized at Northridge we make a pledge, a covenant, to nurture and spiritually raise the baptized in our church. I was able to be raised in the church—be in children's choir, youth group, on a Youth Director Search Committee, compare the church to beloved domesticated animals, and now serve on the Administration Committee, because those before me pledged and sacrificed for our church, and for me. They kept their pledges to me ten times over. Now, it is our turn to ensure the future of Northridge, in doing so, keeping our covenant to God and our baptized. There are endless ways we can lead a more Christ-like existence. Giving sacrificially of your time and finances, not only brings us closer to God, but it removes material distractions, and helps secure the future of our church. I urge you to give, not out of abundance, not comfortably, but sacrificially Thank you to all of you who sacrificed for me. Northridge was there for me. Northridge will be there us. We will be there for Northridge. Please fill out your pledge cards today.

Brenna Buchanan – on behalf of the Stewardship Task Force