

WE ARE ... Stewards of Our Giftedness
Acts 3:1-10
The Rev. Nancy A. Conklin
May 15, 2022

More often than not, the Holy Spirit is less than subtle in Her attempts to communicate with me. Just as I chose this story of Peter and the man crying out for alms outside the temple, the office phone rang. It was a woman seeking help, not at all an atypical occurrence. But this particular woman quickly assured me that she wasn't in need of money, she was in desperate need of a ride. Having been evicted from her apartment, she was at the transfer station in Harrisburg waiting to board a bus to take her to a shelter in Hershey. What she needed was someone who could then help her get back to Harrisburg to pick up the rest of her belongings and take her back to Hershey. I encouraged her to take the bus to the shelter and then ask the director to call me to see how the church could be most helpful. I didn't hear from her again, so I presumed the shelter was able to meet her need. For me, it was a subtle, or not-so-subtle, reminder that the stewardship of our time, talent, and treasure is at times a matter for discernment of how, when, and what we have to give that will bring healing and wholeness into the life of another.

Faithful to following the Law of Moses, the disciples of Jesus continued to worship in the temple until it was no longer possible for them to do so. Three p.m. was not only a daily Jewish prayer time, it was the time Jesus died on the cross, making it an even more meaningful time to worship. As Peter and John approach the temple through the beautiful gate, they meet a man lame from birth. Because of the belief his paralysis was caused by the sin of his parents, he spent his life outside the worshipping community begging for alms to buy the daily necessities of life.

As we know, almsgiving is one of the three Jewish acts of piety. Wealth was considered a loan from God and the poor had a certain claim on the possessions of the rich. The rich were commanded to share God's bounty with the poor. Yet, almsgiving was not merely an act of charity, it was an act of righteousness bringing about the kingdom of God. With that expectation in mind, this man, wholly dependent upon God's faithful people to care, to help, to heal, sat outside the temple crying out his daily request for alms — until that day Peter and John stopped and looked straight at him. The Greek word is *atenizo*, like the English word "attention," meaning an intentional stare that revealed to Peter what the man really needed — not simply money, but the wholeness that would restore him as a member of the community. His classic answer, in the beauty of the King James Version, was, "Silver and gold, have I none." It was a stark declaration of what Peter did NOT have. What Peter had to give was the power of Christ's life at work in and through him.

Faithful stewardship of our own giftedness, be it time, talent, or treasure, requires being able to recognize what we have and do not have to give appropriate to the need. God does not expect us to be all things for all people in our own lives, nor as this particular Body of Christ. God has gifted us with particular gifts and resources to use to accomplish the particular mission to which God has given us. As is true in our own lives, we need to know if and how God desires to use us and them in a given situation. When it comes to how we are to be faithful stewards of the gift of our time, it is true there are just so many hours in a day; and we all start with the same amount,

24 — one of God’s great equalizers. Each day is a gift that is ours to give (or not) to what or to whom we want and each day we do. When it comes to our talents — those gifts that come to us naturally because we are God’s unique creation — they are also ours to give (or not) to what or to whom we want and each day we do. As Jesus repeatedly reminds his disciples, the treasure we accumulate, be it a fortune or a widow’s mite, its true value is measured by how, where, with whom, and in whom we choose to invest it. It is ours to give (or not) to what, and to whom we want, and each day we do.

Like Peter, it is appropriate to recognize the time, talent, and treasure we do not have to give, not only because exhausting ourselves is not God’s desire for us, but because any gift begrudgingly given is not an act of righteousness. As Paul wrote, God loves a cheerful giver because our giftedness is part of who we are. The sharing of ourselves and our gifts is meant to bring wholeness and joy to us and to create and deepen authentic relationships with others.

Peter's response to this man’s cry for help provided more healing and hope than the lame man could ever have expected. “Get up!” and walk in the power of the resurrection. This man would no longer be isolated by the systemic barriers to a life of fullness and joy in community with others. We are very generous with our gifts of time, talent, and treasure, all of which no doubt have the power to change lives, even if only for a time. As we continue to be faithful stewards of the abundance of our unique giftedness, discerning how best to use them to eliminate systemic barriers to a life of wholeness and joy, then we will change lives for a lifetime.

The beggar thought he knew what to expect, but he was surprised to receive more. The disciples gave him more than he could have ever hoped for or imagined. So, too, as Paul reminds us, as we remain wise and discerning stewards of the gifts of our time, talent, and treasure, God will do immeasurably more than we could ever ask or imagine. Silver and gold, we may have none, little, or lots, but what we do have is much more valuable — the power of Christ at work in us to heal and redeem broken hearts, broken lives, and broken relationships through this community of the resurrection.

Invitation: How can I be a wise and discerning steward of all of God’s gifts to me? Collectively, how can we as a church use our collective time, talent, and treasure, for God’s work of restoration in collaboration with those in our community to, like Peter did, give people a “leg up rather than simply a handout?” How do we align our unique giftedness with our passions and God’s vision?