

Listen to the Whisper, Find the Time
Rev. Brian R. Louis, Faith Presbyterian Church

Oct. 22 – Psalm 24; and Matthew 25:35-40 –

35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ 37 Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40 And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’
Holy Wisdom, Holy Word

Two men were marooned on an Island. One man paced back and forth worried and scared while the other man sat back and was sunning himself. The first man said to the second man, “Aren’t you afraid we are about to die.” “No,” said the second man, “I make \$10,000 a week and tithe faithfully to my church every week. It’s Stewardship Month at my church. My Pastor will find me.”¹

Today marks the start of our annual pledge drive that will culminate on Nov. 1 on dedication Sunday, where you tell the church how much you plan to give next year to the church’s mission of spreading the gospel, comforting the poor, helping those who need assistance in our community and beyond, paying our employees, and ensuring we have a beautiful and safe space to continue worshipping and gathering many years down the road. Thank you, Johnnie, for the words earlier in our minute for mission.

Now, today’s sermon is more about the service part of giving, that part of stewardship. Stewardship is the job of supervising or taking care of something, such as an organization or property. Stewardship is the responsibility of taking care of this organization, Faith Presbyterian. We take care of the organization with our contributions financially and giving of our time and talent. The time and talent part has been on my mind a lot this week.

This past Tuesday night we had our monthly session meeting. Now session, for those who may not know, is the group that governs the congregation. It decides what the budget for the coming year is going to be, a process that we are in the middle of right now. Session approves when communion is going to be celebrated each month; it decides on policies of the congregation, such as which outside groups can use our space; and it approves who becomes new members. The session is an important and most powerful group in our congregation.

¹ [Funny You Said That: Stewardship and Humor \(Giving, Part 3\) - Anglican Compass](#)

At this meeting, Session (I am the moderator of session, but I do not have a vote) decided to spend some money to get the roofs of the sanctuary and Virginia's Place resealed to prevent any water leaking. The folks on Session, who are called ruling elders, are leaders in the congregation. If you don't know who is on session, well, look at the beautiful new photographic display in the narthex, and there they are. They are leaders of our organization. They are also chairs of our various committees: worship and music; finance; mission and stewardship, building and grounds; nominating; Christian education; to name a few. These committees, which you can all serve on -- you don't have to be an elder or a deacon to serve on these committees -- these committees do so much important work. They map out the worship calendar for the year, they keep an eye on our budget and giving; they decide what reading and other educational material we are going to use in children's Sunday school. They are critical pieces of our congregation's operation. and if you want to serve on a committee, let me know! Each committee would be happy to have you! If you want to make a difference, serve on a committee.

So, at Tuesday's meeting of Session, a couple of our ruling elders said they were stepping down at the end of the year for various reasons. That is in addition to the loss of two ruling elders whose terms are up and who are rotating off Session. So, in the next couple of months, the nominating committee needs to come up with a few names to serve on Session, so those folks can go before you for a vote early next year. Four slots are almost half the Session that needs to be replaced. It's a lot. We have nine people on session.

I know there are some who are worried about getting folks to serve to replace those who are leaving. I understand that concern. Finding folks isn't easy sometimes. Anyone who has been involved in a non-profit group knows that. Our nominating committee isn't like Jesus, who called apostles with "follow me," and that was it. And they joined him without any objection. It's a little different with getting people to serve on Session.

Instead of worry, I thought, what a great opportunity we have. This is a great opportunity to provide some new voices to the leadership of the congregation. As I sat there Tuesday night as all of this was unfolding, I thought, perhaps this represents a changing of the guard in a sense. Perhaps this is the time for a new generation of leadership. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not happy these people are leaving Session. They have done great work and I'll be forever grateful for the service they provided to the church, and I have no doubt they will all continue to be very active in the congregation. They're not going anywhere. I also realize we need the veteran leadership we have on session and other bodies in the congregation. I think having a mix of new and veteran leadership is ideal.

I'm not a boy whistling through the graveyard, or a delusional optimist. I have faith in this congregation. I'm not worried about this. I have faith in you. I challenge you today as your pastor to prove me right to have this faith in you.

What I have discovered in my year here as your pastor is that a congregation is a living being. It is an ever-evolving, always changing entity. And leadership changes too. A few days down the line after that meeting I am still optimistic that we are going to find great people to fill these seats on session. We have had several folks join the congregation over the past six months to a year who are wonderful, talented, smart, people, who are already having an impact on the congregation. There are several people who are soon to become members. Perhaps among them are leaders ready to step up and serve. There are others who perhaps have been waiting in the wings to be called to step up to leadership, and to serve. It is a great honor and responsibility to serve Christ's church.

For those in the sanctuary today, whether you have served in the past, or are new, or relatively new here, listen. Listen in the quiet. Do you feel a tug at your heart? Is God calling you to serve? Are you feeling the pull, the quiet gentle lure of the Lord calling you in a whisper to serve as a ruling elder? Or perhaps a deacon, or serve on a committee? Is it time to share your gifts with your sisters and brothers in Christ? Are you being called to leadership in the church of Jesus Christ here at Faith Presbyterian?

Listen to that tugging at your heart. If you know, deep down, that it's time to serve for the first time, or it's time to step in again and help, listen to that tugging at your heart.

In one of our hymns today, it says, "God is calling through the Whisper of the spirit's deepest sighs through the thrill of sudden beauties that can catch us by surprise." "God is calling, can you hear? God is calling can you hear?"

And our closing hymn, "Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates," the second verse says, "Fling wide the portals of your heart; make it a temple, set apart from earthy use for heaven's employ, adorned with prayer and love and joy." "Fling wide the portals of your heart." I would encourage you to fling wide open the portals of your heart to serve the church in whatever way you can. Listen to the whisper of the Spirit's call. Find the time to serve.

If we are Christians, we need to follow the example of Jesus. We are Jesus followers. And among the many things that the Lord said and did, and the many things that he was, healer, preacher, teacher, son of Man, chief among them, he was a servant. In Matthew 20:28, the Lord says, "just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve." As the book of order states, "Christ's ministry is the foundation and standard for all ministry."²

There is fellowship in service. You get to know people well. You share a camaraderie with each other. And there is also the good feeling you get by your service to the church and your fellow men and women. We are all called to serve, as our book of order states, "The basic form of ministry is the ministry of the whole people of God, from whose midst some are called to ordered ministries, to fulfill particular functions."³

² Book of Order 2023-25, 17.

³ Book of Order 2023-25, 17.

If you don't think you're qualified, well, odds are you're wrong.

If you want to be an elder, or a deacon, I'm betting you can do it. The Book of Order states that "congregations should elect persons of wisdom and maturity of faith, having demonstrated skills in leadership and being compassionate in spirit."⁴

I see a lot of people in this sanctuary who have wisdom, and have maturity of faith, and have demonstrated skills in leadership in their work lives and in our congregation. I also see dozens of compassionate people. So, as far as I'm concerned, we have no shortage of folks who would qualify to be elders. There's no requirement that you're a member of the church for X amount of time. I think it's an advantage to have folks who are new to the congregation serving because they have an opinion and ideas on matters from a new point of view.

We have an opportunity to have an impact on the community. One of the things that came out of the gathering we had last week was caring for older adults in the community at large, and in our own congregation. The nursing home ministry was a hallmark of our church in the past and I would like to rejuvenate that or something similar. Making sure we care for folks in our congregation who can't make it to worship anymore or can't get around that well is another area I want to strengthen. Tom Mathias, one of our deacons, is spearheading that effort and he and I are going to meet this week and discuss ways to do that better. If you've got ideas on that, let Tom know. Renewing our commitment with Frontera de Cristo and its humanitarian mission of helping people around our border with Mexico. Yesterday we had volunteers from mission and stewardship sorting the hygiene items that will go in our backpacks for our homeless neighbors. We already do many things in the community, and I want to strengthen those efforts.

I promise to make myself available for training for Elders, committee chairs, volunteers, and deacons. Frankly I didn't do that well at all this past year because I didn't know what that entailed. Now I know what to do and how to handle these things. While I've only been here a year, I know better now how to handle these things and when things need to be done. I will be here with you every step of the way when you step up to service.

If you're hearing the whisper of the spirit, let Sharon Townsend, our nominating committee chair, or me, know!

Each Sunday we talk during offertory of giving of your time, talent, and treasure. I know so many of you do that. And I'm so grateful. Keep doing that. But today, in addition to starting to go over your plan for giving next year, I really encourage you to focus on the giving of your time and talent.

Listen to the whisper of the spirit, and find the time to serve your church. It takes all of us to make this church be a light in our city, a light on the edge of town. A place where

⁴ PCUSA Book of Order 2023-25, 18.

Love Grows. I encourage you to ask yourself, Where is my commitment to Jesus Christ? And where is my commitment to his church? Am I giving what I can to the Lord?

Everyone is busy, I know. But the Lord is calling you, that I know. He's calling you to find the time. And listen to the whisper of the Spirit calling you. Remember what Jesus said, "just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve." Our humble servant, Jesus Christ. Let us follow his example. Amen.