

A PENTECOST 18 2011; MT 22:15-21 STEWARDSHIP
Well that was fun, maybe not the usual church song but fun.
The song is special to me really, I am an old camp counselor
at heart and these silly songs were just part of my family
traditions. It was a favorite of my dad's.
So it may not surprise you that we sang it at his funeral—
half of the people were in wheel chairs, clapping hands,
stamping feet, shouting amen.

This is how my father faced his terminal cancer.
Please understand, he was not denying death or his pain and
disappointment in a failing body but rather he was leaning
into his blessings, relying on his faith and finding joy in the
midst of his cancer treatments.
Yes he had bad days, some really bad days.
No he didn't want to die, but singing and giving to others,
what he could give, brought him a joy that pushed back the
edges of his suffering.
I like to think of it as his "**Holy Defiance.**"

I heard the same "**Holy Defiance**" from one of our own
members (Dean Doersch) in a stewardship meeting.
He is a teacher, married to a teacher.
Their October check looked very different from last year's
October pay check. Bill, my husband is a college professor
so we faced the same thing.

This is not unlike what many of you have faced over the
years, when you lost benefits or had your job outsourced or
eliminated or when you couldn't find a job that matched
your education or that could adequately provide for your
family.

So our situation is a familiar one. The discussion ran the
usual line of shock, what next, etc but I was touched and
deeply moved when this man (Dean) quickly moved the
conversation to one of faith and hope.
He told me that he decided that he was not going to let the
current economic situation or decisions in Madison
determine his outlook.
Again, he was not in denial or saying "*Oh well, it will all
work out.*"
He was simply refusing to let his "loss" determine his
ultimate view of life.
"*My happiness is based on something else entirely.*" He told
me. "*It is rooted in my faith.*"

That kind of happiness is called **JOY** in the Bible.
Joy is not about being happy, happy, happy but rather that
kind of refusal, to be defined by current circumstances.
It is again what I call "**Holy Defiance.**"

Jesus life, death and resurrection and all of his teachings and
miracles were "**Holy Defiance.**"
In today's gospel lesson the Pharisees and the Herodians
were out to get Jesus---to trap him.
This encounter happened on the Tuesday, 3 days before
Jesus was crucified.
The tension was mounting.
"*Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor?*" they asked.
Remember Jerusalem was occupied by the Romans.
If Jesus said "*Yes!*" the Pharisees and all of the faithful Jews
would turn away from Jesus.
If Jesus said "*No!*" Rome would retaliate and probably put
him to death.

Jesus, in “**Holy Defiance**” calls for a coin and asks whose image is on the coin and of course they answer “*the emperor’s*” and Jesus responds with his well known words, “*Give unto the emperor the things that are the emperor’s and to God the things that are God’s*”.

It would be a mistake to think that this satisfied everyone. It did not and many scholars believe it was this teaching that influenced the crowd to ask for the freedom of Barabbas, a notorious prisoner, rather than the freedom of Jesus.

Faithful Jews would have known that Jesus was speaking about something much more fundamental than taxes. By asking “Whose image”, the Pharisees and the Herodians would no doubt have thought of Genesis 1: 27. *And God created all humanity in his **own image.***” The coin bore Caesar’s image on it. However, we and all humanity bear the image of God. Everything, absolutely everything belongs to God....

That’s Holy Defiance and it was **that Holy Defiance** which led to the crucifixion of Jesus on the cross. But! But it was **God’s holy defiance** that refused the finality of death and it was **God’s holy defiance that** won the victory over death and **it was God’s holy defiance** that gave us the joy of the resurrection and Easter.

Okay what does any of this have to do with Stewardship and Pledge Sunday.

Well, I believe that Christian Stewardship is precisely “**Holy Defiance,**” of what the world says about the church and about money.

One of the most common complaints I hear about churches especially from the unchurched and the de-churched is (can

you guess) “*All the church cares about or talks about is money.*”

I get a little defensive about that because we do need money to function and like any responsible family or organization, we need to talk about it with our members.

Good stewardship does ask for time, our abilities, interests and money.

But it is more than time, talent and treasures and more than paying the bills and writing budgets.

Ultimately Stewardship is about **Joy.**

Giving to the church is not just one more “should” in our life, like “*Oh well, I suppose I should give more to the church*” or “*I wonder how much I should pledge this year.*” or “*I should volunteer to help this year.*”

Christian Stewardship is about sharing gifts that we have already been given.

Stewardship is an opportunity...

- To give and share
- To invest in something we care about
- To watch something grow or
- To be part of something we find exciting.

It’s about saying yes to God and no to all of the negativity of the world.

There is certainly Joy in receiving a gift freely given.

I’ve knocked on over 6,000 doors in my years of ministry to invite people to church. One time a woman was baking and this woman, who I had never met before, went into her kitchen and just gave me a blueberry pie. Can you imagine that? Another time a man was growing apple trees from seed and he had them in coffee cans and he handed me a coffee can with a 12 inch tree—a free gift, no strings, no expectations, no limits. Wow!

That is God’s kind of giving. Grace, forgiveness, peace, love, endurance, strength, and salvation all freely given.

We don't pay for the sacrament or have to earn our forgiveness or work for our salvation. It is all freely given.

And when we recognize these blessings we also recognize that no matter what our external circumstances may be, our cup is full. So there is Joy in receiving a gift freely given.

There is also Joy in giving a gift freely. No matter what our external circumstances may be, we have something to give.

We have something that we can do for others,

We have something to share with those in need

We have something—even one dollar—to put in that envelope.

My favorite Stewardship image is from Psalm 23.

My cup overflows.

Because we have received gifts freely and plentifully, our cups can do nothing but overflow. We can give freely.

How different that is from the fears that can press in on us—
Do we have enough, will our children have enough?

Joy stands in **holy defiance** of all that, even grief and death.

The Bible reveals Christianity as the most joyful of world religions.

There is joy in Giving to **Jesus Christ** and Christ's ministry.

There is joy in giving to **Others**, especially to those in need.

There is joy in giving to **Yourself**. Not all that we are given is to be given away. It is possible and appropriate to give to ourselves too.

When our Stewardship includes Jesus, Others, Yourself (in that order) there is **Joy** in giving.

This is good news. So...

If you are joyful & you know it, "Shout amen! Amen"