

“Stewardship Creates a New Earth”

Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-3, Isaiah 25:6-9,
Revelation 21:1a & 3-6a & 22:1-5, Psalm 23:6, Mark 12:38-44, 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

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November 1, 2015

Happy All Saints, Reformation, and Stewardship Sunday. Scripture describes the glory those who have entered Life Triumphant, the saints in heaven, are enjoying. **Wisdom of Solomon NRSV 3:1-3** “The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be an affliction, And their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace.” **Isaiah 25:6-9 NRSV** “On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And God will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; God will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of God’s people God will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for God, so that God might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in God’s salvation.” **Revelation 21:1a & 3-6a NRSV** “21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them as their God; they will be God’s peoples, and God will be with them; God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also God said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then God said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.” **Revelation 22:1-5 NLT** “Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations. No longer will there be a curse upon anything. For the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and God’s servants will worship God. And they will see God’s face, and God’s name will be written on their foreheads. And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.” **Psalm 23:6 NLT** “Surely God’ goodness and unfailing love will pursue us all the days of our life, and we will live in the house of the Lord forever.”

Heaven is a glorious celebration beyond our grandest dreams. Today we celebrate resurrection. We celebrate the love of all who have journeyed through the horizon of death to magnificent eternal life. Every aspect of their love and joy is eternal and is awaiting you to savor again and forever. The reformer John Calvin explained once when he partook of Holy Communion, he felt the presence of those he loved in heaven. The Holy Spirit united him with them. He could sense their joy, love, and glory. Perhaps today you might sense the resurrection of someone you love.

Trust God’s promise of resurrection for you and all who you love. Jesus hopes his teachings and the presence of the Holy Spirit will assure you of eternal life, filling you with peace, love, and joy.

The Reformation proclaimed that we are saved by grace. God delights in us. God wants to spend eternity with us. God rejoices in perfecting us, making us whole, and magnifying all our beauty for eternity. Our love, joy, and beauty will ever expand forever. God does all of this as a free gift.

You are a saint right now, not because of your righteous work, not because of your goodness, not because of your love, not because of your stewardship. We are righteous saints, because God through the Holy Spirit gives us Jesus' righteousness. When we physically die all of our pain, struggles, imperfections, sorrows, sin, the temporary physical shell, the cocoon for our soul that is our physical body, is buried and gone forever. At that moment Jesus resurrects every aspect of love, every goodness is polished, every beauty is enhanced, and every joy is magnified. Jesus infuses us with God's righteousness. Our soul that endured the restrictive pilgrimage far from home on earth is now free to soar, receiving a new, eternal resurrection body that shines with every pure aspect of us.

Our resurrection is secure. Since resurrection is not dependent on any works, there is no way we can mess it up. Resurrection is a free gift, grace.

On earth we have a choice. We can choose to bring resurrection into our life and the world today. The Kingdom of God is near. Through our love, joy, and stewardship we can create with God a new earth for us and future generations. We can receive God's blessings, savor them, and bless others. The Reformation saw the role of the church to be once reformed always reforming. We are on a journey creating a new earth. We are not trying to go back in time or back to a certain way of life, rather forward. We are reformed. We have discovered and proclaim God's grace. We are reforming when we discover a new aspect of grace, a new way of love, a new way to worship, to serve, to rejoice, a new way to sing, paint, create, play, and unite. We grow in love. We expand in joy. We then can perceive even more aspects of grace every reforming.

As we journey, every reforming, making choices, our love should be ever expanding enabling us to love that person we experience as difficult, enabling us to love strangers, enabling us to love enemies. As we journey, every reforming, making choices our compassionate listening should grow enabling us to hear and see the goodness in every person and all perspectives. As we journey, every reforming, making choices we should be able to welcome with gracious hospitality every person regardless of status, wealth, race, religion, political party, etc. into our life creating one world wide loving community that includes everyone. As we journey, every reforming, making choices our gratitude should grow, our joy should flourish, our creative beauty should abound.

Mark Brown wrote, "The church, the Body of Christ is essentially progressive: we are making our way forward into God's vision for the New Earth. The Church is not essentially about preservation. We are grounded in the past, we owe a great debt to those who have gone before us to be sure, but we don't live in their world."

The church is once reformed, always reforming, always expanding in love, service, hospitality, and joy. The church is progressive. Imagining the glory of heaven. Strive to bring more and more of heaven to earth.

Mark 12:38-44 NLT "Jesus taught: "Beware of these teachers of religious law! For they like to parade around in flowing robes and receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces. And how they love the seats of honor in the synagogues and the head table at banquets. Yet they shamelessly cheat widows out of their property and then pretend to be pious by making long prayers in public. Because of this, they will be more severely punished." Jesus sat down near the collection box in the Temple and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. Then a poor widow came and dropped in two small coins. Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on."

The religious teachers got stuck in the letter of the law, stuck in preserving religious intuitions. Instead of imagining God's love healing, including and uniting everyone and joining God in creating the new earth they looked to the past. Their hearts curved in on themselves, making them selfish. They didn't believe in grace. They thought God only loved certain people who lived, believed, and thought like they did, so they proclaimed

their way as the only way, excluding others. They used the law to exploit others. They prayed but were not compassionate, not gracious, not generous, not serving. They were afraid to invite everyone into community to enjoy God's love. They saw scarcity, fearful that if they shared there would not be enough so they hoarded resources, creating a religious, political system that kept many poor, others outcast, so a few could have excessive resources.

What do you think of the statement: "Money can't buy happiness, but generosity can."? The religious teachers were never described as joyful people. Yet those who accepted grace and were gracious, those who served, those who loved were described as enjoying abundant life.

In contrast the widow perceived the glory of heaven. She imagined the new earth, serving and giving to create the new earth. She did not become bitter, pessimistic, or cynical. She was well aware of the brokenness of the religious institution, yet gave generously because she believed that partnering with God, and others who are passionate in growing their love, will enable the church to change, reform, be progressive, move forward, helping to usher in the new earth. She kept giving her offering to the religious leaders who were repressing her, shamelessly cheating her, because she focused on the good that they were doing. She experienced God's grace, was gracious and knew that God's grace would wash away the sin of the religious leaders, the faults of the church, and enhance the goodness, beauty, and love. She kept giving of her time, even though the religious leaders told her she was not living right and others told her she was serving wrong, she kept serving, believing that her gift would create a new earth. She kept giving of her talents even though they were often misused, taken for grant, and sometimes not even noticed believing her giving will create a new earth. She kept giving of her worship even when the style, songs and format was not her favorites because she believed the church should welcome everyone. She kept giving of her gratitude and joy refusing to get stuck in her poverty, or her grief in the death of her husband. Her focus was on the treasures awaiting her in heaven, the reunion in heaven with her husband which inspired her giving to create a new earth.

She believed in God's grace, regardless of all the pain and suffering that had happened to her, the corruption and exploitation going on in God's name, somehow she knew God was setting things right. So she continued to invest in her community by giving her last two coins for the good of the whole. It is easy for one to look at how governments and religious institutions mismanage their stewardship and say, "I am going to hold back giving my money. I am going to complete my service and quit." But the widow inspires us to keep giving, to trust God to take all that we give, despite humanity's brokenness, God will make our gifts wonderful, glorious, and every expanding.

The religious leaders gave less and less, their love kept shrinking, until they saw only one way to live, to worship, to be faithful and that one way was their way. They believed that one group of people, one person, should tell everyone how to live. They arrogantly thought they knew all about God, that they knew God's will for everyone. In their minds they put the God who created the cosmos, the God who is beyond time, into a box, into a few laws, rules, and rituals fooling themselves that our feeble works is what saves us instead of God's grace. So they forced their way on others, condemning anyone who did not agree with them. Jesus said beware of these people. Jesus praised the giving of the widow, her ever expanding love, joy and service.

The Apostle Paul wrote, **2 Corinthians 9:6-15 NLT** **"Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. As the Scriptures say, "They share freely and give generously to the poor. Their good deeds will be remembered forever." For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, God will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you. Yes, you will be enriched**

in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God. As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. And they will pray for you with deep affection because of the overflowing grace God has given to you. Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words!”

Every gift you give sends ripples of love through the cosmos. God will multiply every one of your gifts for eternity. Imagine the glory of the saints, rejoicing in heaven. Your stewardship brings that love to earth creating a new earth. Amen