

Arvada United Methodist Church

November 1, 2009

Making Visions Happen, Part 3
Matthew 6: 19-21

Rev. Valerie Oden

Someone took a survey once. Here are the top ten things you do NOT hear in a church:

- 10) "Hey, mister, get up! It's my turn to sit on the front row!"
 - 9) "Pastor, I was so blessed that I didn't even notice the service went over time by 35 minutes!"
 - 8) "You know, I enjoy coming to Sunday School so much more fun than going fishing on Sunday."
 - 7) "Oh, good! We have another missionary with us today!"
 - 6) "Pastor, I'd like to volunteer to be the permanent teacher for the Junior High Sunday School class."
 - 5) "Yes, I would so appreciate having the opportunity to serve on the clean-up committee!"
 - 4) "I just love singing the new hymns I've never heard before."
 - 3) "Well, it seems the sanctuary is already filled, so let's just start the service early."
 - 2) "Pastor, we would like to send you to the month-long Bible seminar on Maui."
- And the number one statement never heard in church is: "Nothing inspires me like the annual stewardship campaign!"

Now, this isn't actually always true, and certainly not at AUMC. Though we might not be sending Rusty to Maui, we do have people sitting in the front row, we are often full, we have volunteers for all ages of Sunday School teachers, and today, we'll be hoping you don't notice if the service goes over half an hour!

As for stewardship, we've heard over the last few weeks from members of our congregation who *are* inspired by the stewardship campaign. Melanie, Betty, and today Brad have offered us their excitement about the possibilities for the church and their enthusiasm for giving to its ministry.

I was taught the importance of stewardship as a child. Perhaps you were too. But if not, consider this. Each week, when we kids got our allowance, we were asked bring our little white boxes. They had three compartments in them, two little ones and one big one. Mom gave us our \$1 in change. Of 2 those coins, one dime went into one compartment in the little white box for our Sunday School offering each week. One dime went into another compartment of the little white box for our savings. Those dimes eventually made it to the bank. And into the big compartment of our little white box went **all** the rest. We could do whatever we wanted with it. 8 dimes! It seemed like so much compared to those 2 little dimes set aside for the church and savings.

Being good stewards simply means taking good care of what we've been given.

It means taking good care of our moments, our words, our resources, our lives.
It means taking good care of hope, goodness, justice.

Have you ever thought of yourself as a steward of hope? Every one of us is that, a steward of hope. Another word for hope is vision. Doing what we can to make happen what we can barely see. Sometimes it means defying odds to move forward.

Maybe you've heard the Starfish Story

Once a man was walking along a beach. The sun was shining and it was a beautiful day. Off in the distance he could see a person going back and forth between the surf's edge and the beach.

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Back and forth this person went. As the man approached he could see that there were hundreds of starfish stranded on the sand as the result of the natural action of the tide.

The man was stuck by the apparent futility of the task. There were far too many starfish. Many of them were sure to perish. As he approached he saw on the beach someone picking up starfish one by one and throwing them into the surf.

As he came up to the person he said, "You must be crazy. There are thousands of miles of beach covered with starfish. You can't possibly make a difference." The person looked at the man. He then stooped down and picked up one more starfish and threw it back into the ocean. He turned back to the man and said, "It sure made a difference to that one!"

Being stewards of hope means taking care of visions of change that we can barely see, doing our part to make them happen. Often this means imagining the world we want our children to raise their children in. How *do* we want our children and grandchildren to grow up? What kind of a church do we want them to share in, and grow in, and have as a community base for their lives?

Bishop Melvin Wheatly told of a teacher in Pittsburgh who was having the members of her class share what they were going to become when they grew up. Most of the class had answered. Some had said they were going to be doctors-nurses-teachers-farmers-all of them specific vocations which the youngsters had chosen. They were about to finish the report when the superintendent of the school dropped in to observe. The teacher was nervous. About the only fellow left to answer was little Johnny, on the back row. Johnny wasn't the brightest in the class and the teacher figured he probably would say something very unexciting and maybe even stupid. In fact, she almost decided not to ask him at all. But to be fair, she put the question, "Johnny, tell us. What are you going to be?" Johnny replied, "When I grow up, I am going to lead a blind man."

- Melvin E. Wheatly, Jr., *Going His Way*.

Where would a child learn that kind of lasting value?

We are called to be stewards of hope, to believe that we can leave the world a better place for our children, and theirs, to point the next generations toward a realm of lasting meaning. The church offers us a center to be about taking care of hope.

Being good stewards means taking care of goodness.

John Wesley said it very well:

Do all the good you can,
by all the means you can,
in all the ways you can,
in all the places you can,
at all the times you can,
to all the people you can,
as long as ever you can.

He doesn't say don't go on holiday. But when on holiday, be aware of being a vessel of goodness. He doesn't say don't take care of your children's education; but while saving for college for them, be aware of being a vessel of goodness.

We are called to do and be what goodness we can.

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Stewardship is simply about taking care of what we've been given, to focus our lives on what has lasting meaning. We are called to cherish our words, and believe that they matter. We are called to take care of hope, and follow Jesus' vision for life. We are called to be vessels of goodness, living from something far bigger than us, something far deeper than us, something of such vast value and meaning that only faith can see it.

What is it that has lasting meaning? When all else turns to dust, and moth and rust consumes, what will have lasted? Surely the ripples from our choices last. The love we share lasts. Goodness lasts. How we take care of our moments, our resources, our lives—that lasts. That's a matter of the soul. That's divine stuff.

Divine stuff. It's what our lives are made of. It's what this church is about, in a unique way. I am struck by how unique Arvada UMC is. In a culture driven by fear, many Christian churches get on the wagon and use that fear for control. We jump off and say, wait just a minute! Christianity isn't necessarily about what the media and the masses are making it!

We offer a different voice. We offer a voice that refuses to sacrifice integrity of thought. We offer a voice that proclaims justice for all, no matter what.

We offer a voice that says humans are intrinsically blessed and called to bless others, not inherently sinners in need of a personal savior. We offer a voice that says faith does not depend on believing the unbelievable but on moving always toward wholeness--communally, spiritually, and intellectually.

The voice that Arvada UMC offers matters. Deeply. Widely. And we here in this room are called to take care of its vision. Called to take care of its hope. None of us can do it alone. But together, we can continue building a community of faith that matters.

It takes all of us. If you have never given to the church regularly, please join us. \$10 a week is a couple of Starbucks treats. If you can't give \$10/week, will you consider 5? Your gift matters.

If you do give regularly, first, thank you. Second, the Stewardship Team has asked us to please consider giving 10% more. Your gift matters.

Jesus called us to treasure what lasts. Taking care of his vision is not a light thing. It matters. To be invited to nurture a church uniquely positioned to carry forth the vision of justice and integrity that Jesus embodied—to nourish it with our time, our talents, our gifts, our presence, our prayers, our resources—that's not a light thing.

It matters. It lasts. It's divine stuff.

We don't have little white boxes in front of us. But we should all have pledge cards available. We are invited to take a few minutes and contemplate our commitment to the church for 2010. As we come forward for Communion, we are invited to drop our commitment forms in the basket. It is not a payment for Communion. It is an expression of gratitude for what matters, a commitment to divine stuff, a pledge to share in the vision of the Christ, uniquely expressed in this church.

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