

Today is Stewardship Sunday and I'd like for us to think about it as a day when consider all that God has done for us and we begin to think about offering our whole self to God--hearts, hands, and the financial fruits of our labors.

What you give to God matters. Your contributions of time, effort, energy, expertise, and money matter!

Stewardship is careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care. You are stewards of this church. The fact that Article 7 passed is *directly due to you*. You were stewards as you attended educational meetings, had conversations with neighbors, posted signs, wrote letters, and shared public testimony.

You took care of this church, not just so that you would have a place to come worship God on Sunday, but so that the question of land ownership would be settled for *all time*. That is a historic endeavor! Your faithful stewardship means that we can worship, the groups that use our space can continue to do so, and that we will be a beloved faith community--a beacon of light--for generations to come. You did this. Your contributions matter! You held on to hope, unswervingly. And, when circumstances caused anyone to falter, you encouraged each other and got back up again.

That's what 'Resurrection' means, by the way, 'to get back up again'. This town saw you demonstrate your Christian values and beliefs in the way you approached the Land Agreement. You took it personally and you did what you personally could do.

If you believe that God so loved the world that he gave his son and that Jesus came here in the form of a person, then you have to believe in the powerful reality that when Christ is involved, *it's always personal*. Because it's personal, your unique offering enhances the greater whole: whether you serve on a committee, or volunteer to teach Sunday School, or manage our website, or give financially.

Stewardship of this church is essential because this church is a steward of the larger community. We positively impact hundreds of lives each week through the Table of Plenty free community meal, Scouts, 12 step groups, and our many mission projects. We share relevant and encouraging Bible lessons that will serve people for an entire lifetime. When you give of yourself to First Parish, your gifts combined with others make it so that together, we can do far more than each of us could do alone.

Do you know the story of stone soup? One person starts a fire and places a pot of water with a stone in it. Another person comes along and says stone soup is great, but even better with a carrot and they bring one from home. Another person happens by and says stone soup with carrot is delicious, but it's even better with celery and they bring some to add. And this happens over and over again with onions and garlic and potatoes and then they all share something that is greater-together-than it would have been had each person only had the one ingredient. This is how church works. We each bring what we have to offer and we're able to 'cook up' and offer far more together than any one of us would have alone.

As a church, we are uniquely poised to be agents of reconciliation. In the last several months, there have been a number of contentious debates that have played out publicly in York. There's been a lot of muck stirred up, but I'm grateful that we can be part of the clean-up crew. God can take a mess and make it a message. I believe that part of that message is that your contributions matter. We are stronger together. We can help bring unity to this community.

Last week, I ended the sermon by giving you 'holy homework' to look for Jesus and invite him to your house--and I said it was easier said than done. You see, it's easy to be selectively Christian, kind and helpful when it suits us, but Christ's call to follow him means that we have to be helpful, kind, forgiving, and grace-filled even when it's painful or difficult. We have some healing work to do in York.

We can do this because when we're holding on to Christian hope--when we're holding it in our hearts, hands, and minds, we can share it with others. Hope is the single most necessary commodity in the world today

Stewardship is care taking. As members and friends of First Parish, we're called to prayerfully and lovingly support this church and its many missions. We are stronger together. Your holy homework this week is to consider what you can do, personally to be a steward of God's church and as such, a steward of the community. With Christ, it's always personal. We are the body of Christ and this is His house. May we continue to take good care of it. Blessed be and amen.