

*Stewardship Of.....
Trees, Time
Talents, Treasures*

Bible Reading:

Psalm 8

Ecclesiastes 3: 1-11

1 Peter 4: 7-11

Deuteronomy 8: 10-18

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STEWARDSHIP OF TREES

(PSALM 8)

What an utterly amazing thing it is - this universe in which we live.
Enormous.

Stand under a clear night sky,
away from city light pollution
look up - and what word other than **majestic** can you use?

Or at the base of an old white pine, gazing up towards the crown?

Or - like we hope to do as a congregation next Sunday afternoon - head up to Gatineau Park and gaze out over the lookout, seeing God's paintbrush splash across the forest?

O Lord, how majestic!!

And we????

How small it makes us all feel.

How limited.

Lives that, as we've seen so tragically, can disappear so quickly.

What are human beings; mere mortals??

What of the lives of these little ones just baptised?

their value?

their reason for being?

Psalm 8 picks up and amplifies a call that comes in the very first chapter of the Bible about who these four children are, and what their task on earth is all about: *You have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honour...*

Lindy, Elianna, Jason, Shauna - royalty, they are.

Princes and princesses in the Cosmic Kingdom of Heaven.

Royalty with a challenging task.

You have given them dominion over all the works of your hands;

You have put all things under their feet....

All that which God has made - at their disposal.

Responsible for it all.

Stewards, they are - of trees, and of all creation.

Talked about that with a couple of parents this week. As with just about everyone - well, you can guess what we talked about.

September 11 has shaken up just about every North American. It has ripped away our complacency. The sheer pain has woken us from a rather lethargic stupor in our comfortable, painless and at times decadent lives. It has forcibly confronted us with the meaning of tragedy, fear, helplessness. Something we've been so insulated from. Something that is the regular part of the lives of humanity in most other regions in the world.

Ruwanda.

Sierre Leonne.

Bosnia.

Chechnia.

Sudan.

Palestine.

Violence, poverty, starvation, slavery, persecution.

And here we sit on this heap of wealth, consumption, and a growing environmental cesspool called North America.

Parents, congregation - fellow pilgrims in the family of faith:

We made a pledge this morning before the Lord, a pledge to raise these royal children. It's a continuation of our pledge to raise all our children as responsible servants of the Lord.

Even more basic than that - in living this pledge we face the challenge of growing **ourselves** as servants of the Lord. Leading these little ones not only by our words, but by our example.

Growing them in Christian obedience in basic elements:

- getting them into church community life right from an early age
- teaching them the rhythm of bible reading, prayer in the home and in their personal life
- helping them grow in ethical and moral purity.

And then, remembering this call of Psalm 8 -

Helping them not to be jaded by North American riches, and Canadian insular peace. To see beyond the richness of Ottawa's suburbs and into the huge challenge of living as caretakers in this world made by Majestic God.

Caretakers of the creation - what a challenge will face them, with increased levels of toxins in groundwater and air, global warming, dwindling natural resources, challenges in developing new technologies and biological processes.

And as co-caretakers of other royalty - of fellow human beings. The cries of children dying agonizing deaths by starvation.... thousands each day. Or those who grow up in refugee camps. Or die as victims of ethnic cleansing.

Our children will not be able to stand before God, shrug their shoulders and say, "*but was I to be my brother and sister's keeper?*"

God will hold them accountable.

Just as He holds us accountable today:

accountable for how we handle our responsibility of being dominion keepers, stewards and guardians of Creation and its inhabitants

accountable for how we raise our little ones to heed this stewardly call of God.

And when He does, when we one day stand before Him:

What answer will we give?

STEWARDSHIP OF TIME

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-11)

Stewards of trees.....

That we are..... and of time.

Of that great collection of moments which confront us.

86,400 seconds clumped in packets that stream towards us each day.

Ecclesiastes 3 provides us with a pot pourri of what time dishes up, a vast array of "could-be's", a pot luck of experiences from the sour to the sweet, the heavy and the light, the harsh and the tender.

Look at these various vignettes, each a slice of life, and try to see a painting -- not a neat orderly painting, but sort of an ancient Picasso.

See the scenes flash by:

The moments that come to us unasked and uncontrolled,

like birth and death
war and peace
as well as the moments we can choose,
like silence or speaking
planting and uprooting.

And then the question -

What does the worker gain from his toil?

How are we to face, to handle, this time stuff?

What do we stand to gain from all this, especially when so much of it seems beyond our control?

Ah, we wonder.

We look back down the corridors of time seeking to make sense of it all.

And as we hold our little children, we look ahead to an unknown future and speculate - how long will it last; what will it bring; how will humanity respond? How safe will it be for them?

And to none of these can we find secure answers.

Only God can fathom it.

God makes all things beautiful in their time.

So says the Teacher. All things fit. Somewhere...

At least from God's distant divine perspective.

For us, well, sometimes it seems right.

Like when we greet healthy, safe arrival of newborn children.

Or when we're surrounded by loving family and friends.

But sometimes.....

Well - How do you fit 9am on September 11 into that statement?

v.11 - "He has set eternity in the hearts of men..."

We look back to the horizon of time ...

and we look ahead into the fog of the future.

And when there are no answers found there, we look beyond and outside of time, beyond this mishmash of bipolar experiences, beyond the timeline to eternity; to the Eternal One who has set us in the midst of all this.

in the midst of life's wild oscillations,

sometimes this way and sometimes that,

in the midst of the vast diversity that life throws at us,

we reach out beyond those things to grab something solid.

Some**ONE** solid.

God.

God sees, knows and grasps all things of all times.

He has control from beginning to end - "*all things.*"

Earth times

Our times

The times of our children & grandchildren.

That, in trust, we leave to God.

We must.

As we must pick up the task that He, in trust, leaves to us:

to live the moment to the full,

to seize the day, *carpe deim*.

to utilize well, rather than foolishly squander

God's gift of **now**.

Bow before the sovereign supremacy of the One who holds the strings over the events of time.

Then rise and take hold of our responsibility as servants of His -
this moment,
this time that He places before us.

We face them as responsible servants committed and devoted to the Son of God, who has entered our times and moments.

As we face the challenges and the off-speed balls time throws at us, pitches that sometimes twist into bean balls, we know that we have a Heavenly Brother, a Saviour who sits at the Father's right hand constantly interceding for us – sending His heavenly wisdom and strength and power to face the times.

In that power then, we can take responsibility for how we handle the times;
the moments that are taken and woven somehow into God's eternal tapestry.

moments with our children and grandchildren
moments in the classroom
moments with our lover
moments in the lab
Making them moments that matter.

For this, too, we stand accountable.

Of this, too, we are stewards.

In this, too, we stand responsible for how we raise our children.

STEWARDSHIP OF TALENTS

(1 Peter 4:7-11)

Challenging, isn't it?

Incredibly challenging days in which to raise children, and see grandchildren grow.

Last days, actually - so says the Bible. *The end of all things is near.*

Some people have asked me this week - "*Do you think this is the beginning of the end?*"

A question requiring a "yes/no" kind of answer.

No, I'm not sure what to think about the end.... whether we have only a few weeks or years left before Christ returns. I'm not sure – because that is a timetable that is kept in the secret places of heaven. It's not for us to know. And any who claim otherwise are either foolish or unbiblically arrogant.

Does it seem like it can't go on much longer?

Yup.

Does it feel like we're getting awfully close to Christ's return?

Yup.

But people - make sure you're ready **every day**.

Because while earth may last, say, another few years – there's no guarantee that you'll make it home from church this morning.

The end of all things is near.

When Peter writes this he is not holding a stopwatch in his hands.

It's not chronological time, but chapters of time that he's thinking about.

We're in the last chapter of history's book - the era between Christ's first and second coming.

Things are moving towards their eternal conclusion.

There is no waiting.

And no turning back.

Prayer, love, hospitality - these become urgent items in the last chapter of history, when - at any moment - the final trumpet will sound and the curtain will come down; when the Eternal Judge will step forward.

Urgent that we live these things.

Urgent that we raise our children in them.

And - do you notice what accompanies them?

An urgency about using gifts - those strengths, abilities, talents and opportunities that God lays in your lap.

Some of us know what they are.

For these young children it's potential yet to be discovered.

And it must be discovered.

And used.

The original word with which this passage was penned is the ancient greek word *charisma*. It literally means, "a grace gift."

The strengths, abilities talents and opportunities that God presents to us are linked deliberately to grace, the gracious goodness, care, forgiveness and healing wholeness of God.

The grace that comes to us in Jesus

in His life of service on earth

in His sacrifice and death on the cross.

in His gift of the Holy Spirit.

As we have been so served by Him, we are called to grace the lives of others with service. To share with them our strengths, abilities, talents and opportunities. They are **not** given primarily for our own pleasure and consumption.

That'll be one of the hardest lessons these little ones will have to face.

That's one of the hardest things for all of us to remember.

And it's one of the key things for us to exercise in living obedient lives of service and devotion;

stewards of our gifts

stewards for the Lord.

STEWARDSHIP OF TREASURE

(Deuteronomy 8:10-18)

If you played a word association game and said, "Stewardship"

inevitably most people will come back saying - "money.... giving money."

In fact - that happened this week as people heard we'd be dealing with stewardship.

"Why," someone asked, "do you want to talk about money when the smoke is still rising in New York?"

"How," another one wondered, "do you relate giving to baptism..... other than maybe that you'll have less to give 'cause you're buying diapers and formula?"

Trees.

Time.

Talents.

Can we see the scope?

Can we see the challenge that faces us in our personal lives?

As we raise our families?

As we set examples for our grandchildren?

Of course, money does have a part to play in the equation.
It's one of the gifts that God gives - a gift for which He holds us just as responsible as He does
the care of creation,
the use of our moments,
and the exercise of our abilities.

It is here that I really worry when I see these little ones.
I worry because of what I see in the adult population.
Did you hear what is warned against in Deuteronomy? Making the claim:

"My power
and the strength of my hands
have produced this wealth.....
for me!" (v.17).

Doesn't that sound terribly, terribly familiar?

If that is what the teaching by example radiates out from those who are adults among us - how will these children learn?

How will we fulfill our baptismal vows?

How will we ever bring them to see that it is God who gives the ability to produce wealth, and that therefore what we have is something we hold - ***in trust*** - from our Lord and Maker?

If we forget that, says the Scripture, we are hell-bent down the road to forgetting Him.

But the reverse is also true.

Therein we find hope.

And a huge challenge.

So, tell me, dear people -

As Lindy and Jason and Elianna and Shauna grow
As they watch us, begin to imitate and develop life patterns
What will they see?
What will we be teaching them?
And what will God say?