

Blessed be God who animates our lives and calls us to be testify to God's goodness and abundance by being good steward's of creation. AMEN

When I was in seminary in Cambridge MASS I did my field work at a parish in Boston Emmanuel in the City of Boston. It was an incredible experience in so many ways and I refer often to my learnings there. The parish was known for its Bach Cantata immediately following Communion just as Bach would have wanted! It was also known for its mission to house the homeless, support the mentally challenged, provide safe shelter for abused women, engage in prison ministry, and to work coordinately and in covenant relationship with the Jewish Synagogue which used the sanctuary as well. The word diverse and eclectic comes to mind. As does the word COMMUNITY.

One of my greatest memories and formational moments came on a Labor Day weekend Sunday. It was the tradition that on that day the parish was invited to Dim Sum at a local delicious restaurant. Like church all were welcome! Wherever they were on their faith journey, wherever they were on their personal one, psychologically or economically. ALL were invited. And apparently people ordered whatever their hearts desired. This seemed like an expensive undertaking and I asked the Rector my supervisor how they could afford it! She responded with such sincerity that for years it was a loaves and fishes moment...after the meal, the bill would come and a manila envelope began to make its way around the table collecting everyone's contributions and in all her time she had never been short more than 25 cents.

So we arrived at the restaurant and were seated, approximately 22 of us!

So here is the thing some of the guests had no money; some had a lot. some ordered lightly; some ordered a banquet! Not only that but one was schizophrenic; one was homeless, one had dementia, and several were Jewish or Muslim or atheists. Jesus would have loved it!

The moment came to pay and I was on pins and needles. When the envelope came to me I put in my share and some extra. I did not watch to see what others did. The envelope came back to Pam, the Rector, and she counted and announced we were within 12 cents! Just another ordinary miracle I said!

ON this Stewardship Sunday I am not sure I need to say much more. It is for me the real life stewardship moment. Our God of abundance teaches us to give our meaningful portion, not just so our debts are paid but so others too might enjoy the bounty.

Let me take just a moment more to link this story to our lectionary.

In churches all over the country metaphorically a bill has been published and an envelope is being passed around. This is but a powerful metaphor for what is happening today and everyday in our own lives. God is preparing a banquet for all of us on God's

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holy mountain. We are invited. No matter how rich, no matter how poor, no matter what...

The question is will we rsvp and will we attend.

What does it cost? It costs our lives.

It is no stretch to connect our lectionary today with this story. It is no stretch to hear Isaiah's most beautiful description and want to be there. It is no stretch to hear Luke and at least remember that we are called to testify to the resurrection and all Christ stands for. We are called to recognize in the midst of chaos and injustice that there is always an opportunity to testify and stewardship in its deepest sense is our witness to the Gospel mandates. Paul tells us in Thessalonians to risk the giving; without expectation of reward as we know it.

we may not know how God means to transform the universe, but we can confess that we know it is in God's power to do so. What remains possible for the single believer, the single congregation, for us, is to do the work involved in such transformation by following the patterns of mercy that Christ has laid out for us. (feasting on the word)

One pattern is to give: time talent and treasure to help God plan the banquet!

And so imagine an envelope passed among you, or a plate, and imagine yourself doing an assessment of what you think you owe and then adding on to it what another might wish to give but cannot, what a neighbor might need in order to more fully participate in the bringing in of the Kingdom. When God opens that envelope and counts the time and talent and treasure, I am betting it comes within 12 cents of the holy invoice!