

*“Meditations on Faithful Stewardship of Time, Talent and
Treasure”*

Meditations for First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of
Decatur, Georgia

Season of Eastertide, Sunday, June 1, 2014

James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Acts 2: 1-4, 38, 43-47; Matthew 5: 13-16; Matthew 14: 13-21

Opening Meditation and Description of Service

Did you hear the story of the senior member of her community

who was awakened by a disturbing sound in the middle of
the night?

She went to investigate and happened upon a burglar in her living
room.

The burglar stood between her and her telephone.

Not quite sure what to do, she took a risk,

leaped for the phone and landed next to him,

so she shouted, “*Acts 2: 38!*”

The burglar froze.

She said, “*Acts 2: 38!*” again and then reached around him for her phone.

The intruder still did not move.

After the police arrived, they asked the burglar why he had not run away.

“Are you crazy?” he said. *“The lady said she had an ax and two .38s!”*

Just in case you are wondering, in Acts 2, verse 38,

Peter is confronted by the fears of his friends who wonder what they should do.

Peter says, *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ...”*

Our Bible story goes on to describe how the newly baptized and their neighbors

built the first churches on a foundation of faithful stewardship.

The very first Christians built the Church of Jesus Christ

by practicing the faithful stewardship of their time, talents and resources.

The Holy Scriptures proclaim:

“All who believed were together and had all things in common.

They would sell their possessions and goods

and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

*Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple,
they broke bread...*

ate their food with glad and generous hearts,

*praising God and having the goodwill of all
the people. ”*

We are Disciples of Christ;

we are a New Testament church,

continually seeking to sink into the Gospel and
bring to life

the core of what makes for a healing church,

a healthy community, and a
wholesome world.

Sadly, honestly, we recognize that the world around us proclaims a
gospel of scarcity,

and insists that people live in fear of a lack of enough.

The language of fear insists that people hoard, keep, protect, deny,
consume, overspend,

build walls and safes rather than build bridges and safe
sanctuaries.

God sent the only Son, Jesus Christ into the world to proclaim a
gospel of abundance,

and the Son of God calls us to live into trust that the Lord
does provide.

There is enough, and to spare.

We are intensely aware of the many blessings of life.

God's goodness overflows and abounds!

Everything God does is over the top with generosity and abundance for all.

God creates... God redeems... God saves... God forgives... God's loving grace abounds.

We give in grateful response to God's goodness to us.

Faithful stewardship is the path to abundant living.

We have the finest standard bearer in our Creator.

God created the world and saw that it is good.

God created you and gave you life and meaning, and sees that your soul is good.

God created the Church, gave us the gift of the Spirit,
and empowers us that we might be good.

*If God thinks what God created is good, then
shouldn't we?*

This morning's worship experience extends a unique and wonderful opportunity

for us to consider – both personally and congregationally --
the faithful stewardship of our lives.

We will sing and pray and hear scriptures,

and then respond to invitations to consider how we use

the time we have been given by God,
the God-given talents we have developed,
and the treasure that has been
entrusted to us by God.

We are faithful stewards of this land and buildings and all they encompass.

We are reminded that our physical plant

– all of the church facilities and grounds –

is sacred space for the practice of Christian ministry.

We are open 8 days a week;

on an average week a thousand people

cross our thresholds and enter our park gates.

We work very hard on the maintenance and upkeep of this safe space;

at the same time

when we have that lived in, loved look,

please be thankful that God is using us for a higher purpose.

We are also called to be faithful stewards

of our staff and servants, our volunteers and personnel.

Each of us is called to serve,

and at the same time may we encourage and pray for those
whom God has set aside
for pastoral, administrative and custodial
ministries of grace.

As we like to say around here, “All hands on deck!”

This is a hands-on, all-in participatory service.

We are being given forms to read, fill out, and then hand in as our offering to God.

There will not be a Children’s Sermon or Children’s Church because we want to emphasize that every soul here has something (or many things!) to contribute.

We are a Six Generation Church.

Everyone can tithe, give, contribute, and make an offering of themselves and their gifts.

Tithing of time, talent and treasure is best developed over a lifetime

if begun in childhood and as a youth;

thus it becomes lifelong habit and spiritual discipline.

So, sit up, pay attention, bring into God's house your best energy,
and listen actively for the divine voice
that inspires, informs, and initiates our giving and
our living.

Meditation on the Offerings of Our Time

Consider a story called "The Big Rocks of Life" as told by Steve Covey, adapted.

One day a professor was speaking to a group of business students
and, to drive home a point, used an illustration they never
forgot.

As the teacher stood in front of the room she said, "*Okay, time for a quiz.*"

Then she pulled out a one-gallon, wide-mouthed Mason jar
and set it on a table in front of her.

Then she produced about a dozen rocks, each the size of a fist,
and carefully placed them one at a time into the jar.

When the jar was filled to the top, she asked, "*Is this jar full?*"

Everyone in the class said, "*Yes!*"

She asked, "*Really?*"

She reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel.

She dumped some gravel in and shook the jar,

causing pieces of gravel

to work themselves down into the spaces between
the larger rocks.

She smiled and asked the group once more, "*Is the jar full?*"

By this time the class was onto her.

Someone answered, "*Probably not.*"

"*Good!*" she replied.

She reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand.

She started dumping the sand in;

it went into all the spaces left between the rocks and the
gravel.

Once more she asked, "*Is this jar full?*"

"*No!*" the whole class shouted.

Once again she said, "Good!"

Then she grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in

until the jar almost overflowed the brim.

Then she looked up at the class and asked, *“What is the point of this illustration?”*

One eager beaver raised his hand

and said, *“The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard, you can always fit some more things into it!”*

“Nice try, but not quite where we are headed,” said the professor.

“The truth this illustration teaches us is this:

If you don’t put the big rocks in first, you will never get them all in.”

What are the big rocks in your life?

A project that you want to accomplish?

Time with your loved ones?

Your faith, your education, your finances?

A cause? Teaching or mentoring others?

Remember to put these Big Rocks in first

or you will never get them all in.

Once when I did this example and got sand and water all over the place,

and then discussed how it applied to the faithful stewardship of our time,

an observer responded, *“I don’t have any time.”*

This is a common response to a widely-held perception:

“No time.”

As people of faith we can identify this perception as scarcity thinking:

Scarcity thinking states that we never have enough time,
or energy, or money, or resources, or commitment,
or people, or purpose...

We could go on.

Truth is, the Lord does provide.

Truth is, speaking of time,

we all have the same exact amount of time.

Question is, how do you use what you have been given by God?

Build and carve out Sabbath time in your life.

Make time for being still, for prayer, for spiritual meditation, for service above self.

What are the “big rocks” in your life?

How might your prioritizing of what is most important to you and God together

empower your dedication of your time and energy and
enthusiasm

to Christ's Church and World?

Plan ahead and follow through with time for serving and living of
your best energy,

rather than your leftovers.

When we prioritize our energy and time, do we give our best or our
remnants?

One day someone called the Butterball Turkey company

and said that she found in her freezer a frozen turkey

with a expiration date 15 years old.

She wanted to know whether it was safe to cook and eat.

The Butterball Turkey Company representative

said the company highly recommended that she throw it
away.

"Oh, that's okay," she said. "I'll just give it to my church."

Start with your priorities, and everything will flow from there.

Instructions: *Please fill out a Time Stewardship form, and when
the Deacons pass the offering plates, place it joyfully in*

them. Thank you!

Meditation on the Offerings of Our Talents

During the sugar shortage in World War II,

a man at a Washington, D.C., lunch counter called out loudly, *“More sugar!”*

A waitress across the diner shot back, *“Stir what you got!”*

Everyone has been born with some natural aptitude,

some natural ability,

some talent,

and some gift.

However great or small, each of us has been born with some “sugar”

– something that can be used and developed,

multiplied and shared to the glory of God.

“Stir what you got!”

George Calvert, my father, always worked with whomever God

sent.

He was an ordained pastor, and he also worked full-time jobs

so our East Harlem congregation would not have to pay him a salary.

At one point George taught junior high school for 15 years.

More often than not there would be a couple kids in a class

who were very challenged to sit still for 45 minutes,

much less six or seven hours a day.

George's colleagues would moan in the teacher lounge,

saying "*My class would be perfect if only I didn't have so-and-so in the room!*" My dad would reply, "*Work with whomever God sends into your classroom.*"

That particular child really needs your love.

Besides, if so-and-so left, another would take his place!"

Basically, George encouraged people in the church and at work (and his sons!)

to "stir what you got."

God works in and through churches of all shapes and sizes and backgrounds,

imperfect, wrestling, struggling, seeking daily to find our way to home and hope.

Surely God loves congregations like this one,

where people know and remember your name,

where you are much more than a face in a crowd.

You are a personality, a seeker, a parent, a child,

a follower of God with gifts and talents to offer, provide,
and shine!

Personally, my family chooses to be a part of communities of faith

that are authentic and genuine in the reality of life's
unevenness,

our need for grace and healing,

and are filled with people who seek positive
relationships.

We want to be involved in a church that "stirs what it got."

Decatur First Christian Church has always been a congregation

that cares deeply for people,

ministers to and alongside families of all shape and
size and form,

and seeks to serve just as Jesus Christ served
us.

We don't have swimming pools and spas,

but we have a baptistery and healing words of hope and
comfort.

We may not have a \$2 million budget,

but we also don't have any debt (knock on wood).

We may not have a television program,

but we do have word-of-mouth,

which communicates far more effectively.

We are blessed with so much

we all have a full-time job to simply “stir what we got.”

Thank you for your generosity of spirit,

your faith sharing,

your prayers, your presence, your hope, and your
grace.

Thanks for sharing your talents and gifts of the Spirit,

given to you by God to be used for the glory of God.

Thanks for offering up to God the talents that you have

and for being willing to work and play alongside those
whom God sends.

We call that stirring what you got.

Instructions: Please fill out a Talent Stewardship form, and when you are ready find someone near you and share with each other what talents you hope to give to the glory of God. Then, we come forward to receive Holy Communion, place it joyfully in the common basket. Thank you!

Meditation on the Offerings of Our Treasure

How much is enough?

Jesus saw the need of the people before him,
and he had compassion on them.

Jesus saw the Israelites gathered on the field,
and he had compassion on them.

The disciples were at a loss of what to do,
the need is so great and what we have to spare is so little.

You can imagine their thought process.

What difference will it make?

If we feed one person, everyone will want something.

We do not have enough to meet the demand.

They told Jesus to send them away,
to tell them to go back into the villages to eat.

But he answered them, *“You give them something to eat.”*

They said to Jesus, *“Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread,*

and give it to them to eat?”

Jesus said to them, *“How many loaves have you? Go and see.”*

When they had found out, they said, *“Five, and two fish.”*

So Jesus had the people sit in groups of 100s and fifties,

and he took the five loaves and two fish

and looked up into heaven and gave thanks.

And he shared what he had.

What happened next is considered a miracle.

This was a miracle you and I have witnessed many, many times.

What happens when you are in a group and someone starts to share?

Most often people start to pitch in.

A dollar here, a helping hand there,

a barn raising over yonder,

here a moving party with lots of pizza and laughter,

across the street a sharing of favorite dishes

with women and children in Hagar’s House
Shelter

or hygiene kits with homeless

neighbors in Atlanta.

And the miracle is that what is discovered, what is created,
what is produced from almost nothing is enough, is
sufficient.

The Lord does provide;

God's provisions are more than enough for our needs.

Margaret Mead pointed out that not only do small groups change
the world,

it is the only way it ever has.

Never underestimate the power of a small group of people

committed to feeding one another,

a small group committed to caring for real needs of
real people,

a small group committed to social change.

The Lord provides through small groups of people

working and playing together in concert, united to serve.

Through such love God's provisions are more than enough for our
needs.

How much is enough?

A few years ago a study was done to find out what it would take
for us and our neighbors to become satisfied

with what we have, with what is provided.

Interestingly, the answer was the same

whether the respondents were rich or poor or smack dab in the middle.

The answer is 20%.

Across the board people felt or thought

that if they had twenty percent more they would be happier,
they would live better, their nerves would be quieted.

Didn't matter whether they made \$10,000 a year or \$100,000 or \$10 million.

Each one felt they needed a little but more.

Let me point out an observation:

those who feel or think this way

will never, ever be satisfied,

for they will always be reaching and searching and seeking,

when all they need is already provided, right here,
within and without.

How much is enough?

Deep down inside we know, we know

God's provisions are more than enough for our needs.

So we are called to God's ask that we give, and that we give generously and joyfully.

Giving is a response to grace.

Giving is a matter of discipleship.

Giving is a matter of growth.

Personal growth is at the heart of what we do in the church.

Yet so often personal growth is not what we expect nor gain.

Too often the norm is sameness.

If you do not expect to change, you won't.

A pastor went to visit a church member who was recovering from surgery.

The patient was just coming awake from the anesthesia.

He could not discern the shadowy figure by his bed.

"Who are you?" he whispered.

"I am your pastor, and I'm here, and God loves you."

"Oh, yes," the patient said, "well, put me down for the same amount as last year."

Growth means moving from (a) where I am, to (b) where God calls me to be.

That means growth at every level.

Biblical teaching suggests we move toward, to, or beyond a tithe.

Tithing is a God-given way to measure growth.

Our tithes support God's mission, not a budget.

Let's shift our thinking from funding a budget to resourcing God's mission.

A budget is a moral document,

showing our priorities and impact in the wider community.

And the miracle is that what is discovered, what is created,

what is produced from almost nothing is enough, is sufficient.

The Lord does provide;

God's provisions are more than enough for our needs.

Instructions: While Kathy Westbrook graces us with offertory music, please fill out a Treasure Stewardship form, and when we come forward to receive Holy Communion, place it joyfully in the common basket. Thank you!

All power to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Extra Material:

A nurse in a city hospital spent an hour in prayer in adoration of
God

and in preparation for the work she was about to do.

You know, if you place your shoes under your bed at night

then every morning you will start the day on your knees,

and, while you are down there,

go ahead and say a prayer of adoration and
preparation.

So, late one afternoon, toward the end of her shift, the nurse was
weary;

she was weary from work

and weary from aiding an angry and abusive
patient.

At that moment two visitors walking down the hall.

They glanced in the door, quickly taking in the scene.

One spoke loudly to the other, saying,

“I would not do that for all the gold in Fort Knox.”

The nurse paused in her work and said clearly and gently, *“Neither
would I.”*

The visitor apologized profusely.

With a warm smile she said, *“This work is only possible when one
prays first,*

‘Lord Jesus, help me to remember that

*there is nothing you and I together
cannot do.’”*

Through the power of the Holy Spirit

poured down upon us in the waters of our baptism,

there is nothing God and you and I together cannot do.

The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:18,

“You should know that your body is a temple for the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is in you.”

You, my friends, are one with the Holy Spirit.

There is no escape.

There are no impossibilities.

There are no restrictions.

Love's claim is without restrictions!

All things are possible through the One we love, the One who first loved us.

All things are possible through the God of love.

How much is enough? This question is raised in the story of stone soup.

The town is upset for three hungry soldiers wander into their village.

They hide their provisions and close their doors and windows.

Oh, we have no food, and no place for you to sleep.

Well, we'll have to make stone soup.

The curious villagers watch as the soldiers build a fire
under a large kettle filled with water.

The three men said, "All we need is five large stones."

The kindly villagers humored them and found some stones nearby.

The stones are put into the water and soon it begins to boil.

Ah, if only we had some carrots.

I've got some carrots, says a villager. She ran to get some.

Ah, if only we had some potatoes...

I've got some potatoes, says a villager. He rushed off to fetch a bag.

Ah, if only we had an onion or two...

I've got a spare onion....

Soon the kettle of stone soup is delicious and plenty to feed all,

and that night the three wandering souls sleep

in the homes of the mayor, the butcher, and the miller.