**Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16**
Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old--and Sarah herself was barren--because he considered him faithful who had promised.

Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore." All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

**Luke 12:13-21; 32-40**
Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."
Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?'
Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'
But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks.
Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.
"But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

“There Will Your Heart Be”

The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee

August 7, 2022

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." This verse from the letter to the Hebrews offers a succinct definition of what may be the most difficult concept to understand. We have faith in what we cannot see, while we live in a world that says "I'll believe it when I see it." This push and pull can be stressful, which is why I have always been grateful for church community. When my faith falters, someone else's holds me up; the converse is also true. Reading the verses from Luke's Gospel this week as we also consider what our faith offers and asks of us can invite us to look forward in new ways. We may understand our role of stewards as similarly looking forward in equal measure to the degree to which we look at our history. How do we, as a community of faith, trust that God walks with us into an unseen future?

From *At Ease: Discussing Money and Values in Small Groups*: “Wesley K. Willmer, Vice President of University Advancement, Biola University, reviewed the number of times various topics were mentioned in the Bible. He found that believing or believers appeared 272 times, pray or prayer 371 times, love or loving 714 times, with possessions and giving appearing 2,172 times. He estimates that 17 of the 38 parables are about possessions. Luke’s gospel, which some consider especially directed to ‘better-off’ believers, keeps the issue of money front and center. So, it’s a little surprising that money is considered such an awkward topic in the church. Or maybe it’s not so surprising after all. As Mark Twain observed, ‘Most people are bothered by those passages in Scripture which they cannot understand; but as for me, I always noted that the passages in Scripture which trouble me most are those which I do understand.”

Martin Luther says “There are three conversions necessary: the conversion of the heart, the mind and the purse. Of these three, it may well be that we moderns find the conversion of the purse the most difficult.”

We don’t have to keep separate our relationship with God and our finances, our vocations. Lessening this separation may be tantamount to conversion for many of us. When I began in ministry by starting my seminary studies in 2002, I began to think about my finances in a new way. One way was to challenge myself to be more open about what comes in and what goes out. This leap was made a bit easier by the fact that my salary is a line item on our budget. Indeed the pastor’s expenses are the largest line item on the budget, which makes me consider my giving to the church and other institutions very carefully. I have done so since seminary, when I began the practice of tithing. I would tithe then, as I do now, from the net of my income each year. My example for this was my own mom, who taught me that writing the first check of the month (Remember paper checks?) to the church helped her to know that all the rest would fall in place. This remained true after she became a single mom to five kids in the 70s. Still, while having to work hard to balance her budget, she wrote her first check to the church, making sure that she didn’t only give God her leftovers, but her figurative first fruits. In this summer season of stewardship pondering and giving of gifts and tithes to this church, I am grateful for the saints who have gone before us, and those among us who give. We worship in an amazing sanctuary, or outside with electronic equipment that has us sharing worship with members and friends far and wide; we study in beautiful rooms. Through generous financial commitments in the past, this edifice was constructed. I would guess that our members from 1772 couldn’t imagine that in 2022, were gifts from the congregation the only income we had, each of our 70 very active members would need to give $66/week to meet our annual budget. While use of our investment accounts and fund raisers cover some of our expenses, pledge giving is the bulk of our income. Through current gifts we heat and repair the building; we reach out to others because we have the financial wherewithal to do so. You pay my salary and Ann’s; you make sure we run smoothly by offering Vickie a wage. You entrust the good care of our grounds and much building upkeep to our sexton Doug and to our cleaning contractors.

I am not particularly a numbers person; not an accountant by any measure. I do think that you all may be interested to know some of the other ways I have been looking at the budgets of the past and the proposed budget on which we will vote on September 11th. I’ve shared with you what our overall stewardship income would be if all gave equally. Of course we all realize that we do not all have equal means, however. Maybe you will find it interesting as I do, that we *do* average essentially the same per person giving as we would need to make up the deficit. We could divide up our deficit of $52,628 or so by 70, as representing an estimate of the people who participate in worship or other church programs through the year, divided by the days in a year. If I first told you how much this amounted to each month, you might thing to yourself that you already give a great deal and wonder whether you can do any more. For some of us, $62/month is a lot of money. For others of us, it is not. If we think of it weekly, we might begin to frame our reflection on what else we receive for this amount of money. For around $15/week, I might treat myself to a lunch at the Co-op or part of lunch at Sandie’s. For a little over $2/day, might we give a figurative coffee at Bucklyn’s to the church to help us carry out our mission in community? Some of you cannot afford this, and so I wonder if someone else among us might give enough more to cover a neighbor’s figurative cup of coffee. WHAT MORE CAN WE DO?

In the weeks ahead, we will be looking very closely at our role of stewards, and I encourage each of us to keep in mind Christ’s Gospel admonitions regarding the way we sometimes cling to physical resources. We will be weighing our assets, financial, physical and spiritual, and we will be looking to the future of this Body of Christ while also recalling the gifts of the past. We use our assets, we spend our money differently from those without faith. We trust in God’s provision for us, abundantly, and so we give, which is certainly different from those who hoard. Thanks be to God, we will have enough.

Let us pray: Holy God, help us to let you be Lord of our whole lives, and strengthen us to do the work of loving our neighbors as ourselves. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.