

Our **scriptures for today** seemed to be linked in an interesting way. As I read, and then **re-read** them, I became aware that some themes, when taken together, form a **strong and positive message for us**.

From **Jeremiah** there is a message of **generosity and prosperity**, telling us to **bloom where we are planted**, live in the **present** and **do not wait** for some far off future dream, **live your dream now**. **“...seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you...pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”**

From the **Epistle**, the message **charged me to remind you** to be **faithful**, and to **warn you not to wrangle with each other** over words because it **does no good** and it **ruins those who are listening**.

And the message from the **Gospel** reminds us to be **grateful**, and **gratitude is really important**.

Did you know that “they,” the infamous “they” have done **scientific studies** that show that **thankful people have fewer physical ailments** and they **sleep better**? They tend to be **less likely** to be **aggressive or to struggle** with emotions like **envy** and **resentment**. Grateful people tend to be **higher in self-esteem** and they find that **gratitude helps them to build relationships**. It turns out that **gratitude is a powerful antidote to some of the things that tend to poison our souls**.

The **themes** from the scriptures I chose this morning then **are: generosity and prosperity, faithfulness, and gratitude**. Now, I want to take a minute to put these **scriptures into perspective**.

If we look **back a couple of weeks** to the sermon on only **serving one master**, I talked about the **Jews understanding** that they are **one people**, and they had laws that **benefitted the whole community**. Chiefly, I commented on the law about **not collecting interest** on lending. The **Jews understood** that if the **individuals** in the community **thrived** and **helped each other**, each individual family, and then the **whole community** would **become stronger and more vibrant**. They knew that if people **helped each other** instead of seeking to profit off of each other, everyone benefits.

If you **ask Jewish people** about being Jewish – and I have – the answer they give more often than not, it that **being Jewish is not so much a religion they practice**, but that being Jewish **is a way of life**. They are all about **prospering themselves**, but they also **understand that when everyone in the community has their needs met**, and is prospering, the **whole community benefits**.

I think that is a really **good model** for us as **Christians**. Being a Christian should be a **way of life**. A way that is guided by the teachings of Jesus -- a Jew. A way of living where we love and respect each other, offer hospitality, stand up and for each other, and recognize that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, Children of God, Inspired by the Holy Spirit. If we are going to succeed together, then we need to work together.

Jesus is the “Way,” and we need each other.

The **ancient Jewish laws** intended that we **not profit from** each other, but rather that **we profit for each other**. I am becoming increasingly convinced that **greed** is the largest, **single cause of hatred and sin**. **Greed diminishes** us – makes us **small**. The **opposite of greed is generosity**, and generosity **grows**. Generosity is **catching**. **Acts of kindness and generosity can become contagious** and that is what we should strive to achieve.

Strive to be generous, kind, and grateful -- and start now. Live generously, **be kind** and **show gratitude** in this moment and **every moment** to come. **Love each other**. **Build relationships** that last and support others. **Respect and recognize the people** in your **family, workplace, school, neighborhood, and parish** as potential allies. And if we all pull together, **we can make the world a better place – for everyone**.

Doesn't that sound great? It does, but how do we do that? **Where do we start?**

It starts inside, in our hearts, and it **requires faithfulness** and it requires **engagement**. Our choices matter. **Make mindful choices** that reflect **generosity and prosperity, faithfulness, and gratitude** – and make them everyday.

A word about mindfulness: I think we have been given a gift in having **handheld connectivity** to the world. Our **electronic** devices have the power to connect us in ways – global ways – that was **not possible just a few years ago**. Like everything in our world however, use of these devices needs to be **in balance** with the rest of our lives. There is such a thing as **too much of a good thing**. We need to pick our heads up out of our phones, **look around, look at each other, and engage**. We are subject to the laws of nature and we need to **stay in balance**, but we also need to **stretch ourselves** and move out of our **comfort zones** and engage with each other in ministry.

Some of the toughest battles we fight are within ourselves, between what we are comfortable with, and what we feel called to do next. Right now we are in the midst of our stewardship campaign.

When I first moved to the DC area and started attending an Episcopal Church, I volunteered a LOT of my time teaching Sunday School, and I eventually became the Youth Minister of St. Michael's in Arlington, VA. Every week I would throw money in the collection plate. Some weeks more than others, as I was self-employed and some weeks were frankly better than others. **Then it happened, my parish priest** asked me why I had not pledged. My answer was very clear. I did not see a reason to write off what I gave for taxes, as a gift to God is just that and I did not feel the need to be compensated by Uncle Sam. Furthermore, I made better money some weeks than others and tossed what was left into the plate -- every week, faithfully. I would not want to make a commitment I could not keep. My answer seemed reasonable – at first.

Then she asked me if I expected her to be there for me when I needed her? If something happened to me, did I think someone from the parish would visit me in the hospital, bring food to my home, or, God forbid, burry me? Well, of course I answered, **after all this is my church**. Then she asked me if I thought it was fair for me to expect the church to commit to me when I would not commit to the church? I had never thought of it that way. I knew that I gave at least \$5 per week, usually more, and it dawned on me that committing to \$250 a year, was a fine first step. I could always pay more, I could even pay less. **Confucius said, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."** My journey toward tithing began with a **\$5 commitment**. There was a bonus – **perhaps for the first time, and in a deep and profound way I felt like I truly belonged to the parish**. I had overcome my fear of commitment and gained a deeper relationship with my faith community.

A wise woman once told me that **the meaning of life** is that we do the best we can, and leave the rest to God. At one time, tossing my leftovers into the collection plate each week was the best that I could do. **The moment I possessed a deeper understanding, I took my first step, my leap of faith.**

The bottom line in my story really is that I was afraid to commit, and being afraid to commit is, I think, **one of the most basic and common fears we have**. Fear of commitment impacts us in making big and small decisions, and is tied to our trust in ourselves and in God. **It is also tied to our manic schedules** that seem to rule our lives – feeling like one more thing with get us to the breaking point – it is about choices.

I had taken a leap of faith that lead to a deeper relationship with my community and with God.

What you pledge is a question for you to consider on your own in a private conversation with God. Stewardship is **everything you do** after you **say you believe**. **Today I would like you to consider** how you, as a contributing member of this church have **engaged in stewardship as one body**. One of the beautiful things about pledging is that it makes you realize that you are really part of something bigger.

If you have not done so yet, **I encourage all of you to commit to this Body of Christ** and fill out a pledge card. If you looked at the package, you would see that the pledge cards are **not just about money**, but also have a space for you to **pledge you time and talent**, and we **need volunteers** to make our worship and outreach deepen and become more vibrant for all of us.

Advent starts our church year and it will be upon us very soon. I wanted to give you a **glimpse** at some of the ways we, as the church – and remember, the church is not this building, “we” are the “church,” engaged the world and each other over the past year.

Just in the past year, YOU as the Church of Holy Cross:

You sent **Lay Eucharistic Visitors** – to bring communion to those who could not make it to church and **You** were diligent in praying for others.

You fed over 150 school children in Tanzania through the Portage Program.

YOU made sandwiches for more than 700 people in the shelter at Bailey’s Crossroads

You provided Easter meals and baskets for 9 families

You gave to the UTO to fund their programs.

You filled the weekly Red wagon with food for CHO

You participated in a Youth Day of Service and worked on a farm

You volunteered on clean up day, planted, watered and cared for our grounds

You traveled to Dungannon and helped repair homes and restore hope

You traveled to Tanzinia and built a playground and relationships

You made Vacation Bible School possible

You made coffee hour happen, **You** set up for services, **You** sang, **You** cooked **You** cleaned **You** fixed, **You** facilitated, and **You** participated in our ministries and programs.

You collected personal care items for the residents of the Jackson Field Home.

You, the children of Holy Cross tithed Halloween candy for our troops, and made valentines for refugees.

This Friday **You** will cook chili and make pies!

YOU welcome strangers to join us at our Fellowship events and **Concerts and you welcome newcomers as they join us each week.**

With **YOUR** participation in Art-n-Soul and your giving of starter kit donations for Pathways to Housing DC, **YOU** are helping to transform lives.

Next week, You will walk in the crop walk to support of those who are hungry.

Soon **You** will again engage in buying Thanksgiving meals for 9 families, put up our Angel Tree, and provide food and gifts for families at Christmas.

You came together to play, sing, make ‘Smores, cook breakfasts, make subs, tell stories, and share laughter.

This is not a complete list, but whenever the **staff and clergy** -- whose salaries you make possible -- provide **hospitality, support, and care** to parishioners or strangers, **YOU** are providing that **hospitality, support, and care**.

You have been a community – a community that is growing and changing and improving because of your ideas and support. I am excited about implementing some of the rich ideas that came out of our listening sessions, and offering opportunities for all of us to engage in mission and ministry and each other in new and exciting ways.

Go about your days in peace, live generously and prosper, be faithful, be grateful, and as the Psalm today begins, so begin each day and, “Be joyful in God.” **Amen**