

19 Pentecost  
Christ and Grace

James 5:13-20  
September 30, 2018

Mark 9:38-50

Here we are on the last day of September, and it's an important day in our parish life, for several reasons. It's the first Sunday of our annual stewardship campaign, it's Claire's last Sunday as Lay Assistant to the Rector, and it's the start of a new way of being the church as we adjust to some of the changes that invariable come along with Claire's retirement. It might seem a stretch to think that these important things are connected to our lectionary readings for today, but let's try.

Here's a basic definition of stewardship to get us all on the same page. Stewardship is the conducting, supervising, or managing of something, especially the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care. In our case this morning we are talking about our church, Christ and Grace, and not only the church, but also each one of us in this church. In fact, our theme for this year's campaign is Hope, Healing, Hospitality, and You to emphasize that the church is not the building but the people, and every one of us is needed to complete the pie, to make the church whole.

The reading from James gives us such a description of what church looks like. A church that is healthy and whole is a church where every person participates, because it takes all of us to do the work of the church. Together we pray, offer praise, care for the sick, and confess our sins, all the while acknowledging that we are not perfect and sometimes wander from the truth. But in the church we care for one another and hold each other accountable when we wander.

It seems to me that we might add to these responsibilities those things that Jesus mentions in our Gospel reading - welcoming those we may not always think are worthy and giving them hope; giving those who thirst a cup of water, meeting basic needs, thereby offering hospitality; and being very careful not to cause others to stumble, especially the little ones. When we do these things we bring the healing presence of Christ into the lives of everyone who comes through our doors as well as to those outside of our doors impacted by our ministries in the community.

This holy work invites participation from every one of us. Realizing that we have a great gift from God in this family we know as Christ and Grace, realizing that we are each part of the whole, from the youngest child to the most wise elder, we have the responsibility to care for this gift. To nurture and share the gifts of God is the most essential definition of stewardship.

It is no secret that Claire has been a vital part of this work of stewardship for many years. She has modeled for us how to participate, how to learn, how to serve, and most of all, how to love. How will we be good stewards of Claire's ministry among us? How will we continue our ministries in new ways?

At the end of our Gospel passage, Jesus talks about salt. Claire has been salt for us, even as she has taught us to become salt for one another. As we move forward – into a new stewardship season, into a new way of being church as a result of Claire's retirement, may we become salt for one another, because every piecrust needs a pinch of salt!

I want to leave you with a story by Anthony de Mello, an East Indian Jesuit priest. This story, "The Salt Doll," illustrates the awakening to our true selves, helping us understand that we are all a part of the whole, all one with God.

A doll made of salt journeyed for thousands of miles over land, until it finally came to the sea. It was fascinated by this strange moving mass, quite unlike anything it had ever seen before. "Who are you?" said the salt doll to the sea. The sea smilingly replied, "Come in and see." So the doll waded in. The farther it walked into the sea the more it dissolved, until there was only very little of it left. Before that last bit dissolved, the doll exclaimed in wonder, "Now I know what I am!"<sup>1</sup>

We are on a journey to discover who we are as the Body of Christ - a journey toward unity with one another and ultimately with God. We will keep walking together until we are dissolved. Dissolved in love.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony de Mello, *The Song of the Bird* (Image: 1984), 98.