



October 28, 2007

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

Psalm 65

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

“A Couple Things”

Ministry provides me with the opportunity to do many things I enjoy. My work life is varied and meaningful in most respects. One thing I really love is meeting with people who are interested in becoming members of the church. We go over the history of the Christian church as a whole; we focus on the history of the Methodist movement and of the birth of our denomination. We learn about the history of this church- that has been present in St. Charles since the late 1830's. We also reflect on the membership vows made by all people who join the church.

When we join the church we make what is called a “profession of faith”. We accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and our Savior. This means we will turn to Jesus as the “boss” of our lives—he is our LORD- the One who rules our hearts. It also means he will save us when we turn to him in trouble—either trouble of our own making, through poor decisions and sinful actions, or trouble with a capital “T” that seems to come out of nowhere, - in things like hurricanes and cancer.

We also promise to support Baker Memorial United Methodist Church with our prayers, our presence, our gifts and our service.

When we say, “I believe in Jesus, my Lord and my Savior,” that’s not the END of anything. It’s just the beginning of a great adventure.

We are entering into the time of the year when we focus on “stewardship”. Every fall we look forward to the coming year and invite the congregation to make a commitment to support the church’s ministries through their financial giving. My

dad actually hated this time of year in the church. He used to balk at going to worship on Sundays in October and November. My mother had quite a challenge in coaxing him to attend. If we got very far into November, she'd become insistent- pulling my brother and me into the argument: "Jim," she'd say, "If the kids don't get to church soon they won't be able to be part of the Christmas pageant!" So, at that point, we'd go, with my Dad grumbling on the way in the car.

We often think stewardship is just about the way we handle the money God gives us throughout our lives. A steward is one who manages the property that belongs to another. But stewardship is about how we handle EVERYTHING God provides: our time, our talents, our treasures, our LIVES THEMSELVES. There's a great quote about stewardship from Clarence Stoughton: *Stewardship is everything you do after you say, "I believe."*

Stewardship is everything you do after you say, "I believe." Friends, the United Methodist Church is completely on board with this. The church gives us guidance on what that looks like through the membership vows. After we say we believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior, we commit to doing several things. These are not complicated things. To be good stewards we are called by God to pray, to show up, to give our money and our time and abilities in service.

Today let's think about the first two. We promise to PRAY and to be PRESENT.

There are two questions we often live by that oppose these promises:

- 1) Why pray when we can worry?
- 2) How can just showing up make any difference?

Here are a couple examples from my life that confirm the power of prayer and presence.

I graduated from seminary 20 years ago. During the three years I spent at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary I became very close to six women. We serve in various regions- I'm the only one pastoring in Northern Illinois. The prospect of scattering to separate corners of the country really worried us. So, we made a covenant- a promise to meet twice a year for a few days, to support one another as Christian sisters.

This Covenant group has now met every October and April for twenty years. And the presence and prayers of these women have changed my life. When two or three gather in the name of Jesus Christ amazing things happen. We always share how our lives are going, and identify prayer requests for one another. One year I shared

that my family was being challenged in a multitude of ways: of our four kids, three were in crisis, with brain surgery, school problems, attention difficulties and so on. My husband had lost his job. At that point I asked my sisters to pray for me to be able to experience peace in the midst of the chaos. I somehow knew the chaos wasn't going to disappear overnight. But I yearned for the peace that God can provide.

A full year later, as we prayed and shared together, I found myself talking about an unusual peace that would come over me at odd moments: while walking the dog, driving my kids somewhere—a peace in which I felt blessed to have my family in my life, problems and all--- a peace that recognized the love that was woven into the chaos. (Yes, twelve months later the chaos was still present.) One of my friends burst out with delight, “Ronni! That’s what you asked for! It’s what we’ve been praying for! Do you remember? You asked for peace in chaos!”

What a gift that moment was. I had not made the connection. But the prayers of my friends had been faithful. And the presence of my friends twice a year helped me recognize God in my life.

Twenty-eight years ago, my husband Gilles and I attended a Marriage Encounter weekend retreat. The experience had been recommended to us by a couple in Friendship United Methodist Church of Bolingbrook, where we were then members. We were excited about the prospect, but had no idea what to do with our four children, aged two, five, eight and eleven. Our friends said, “No problem! We’ll keep them!” We couldn’t believe they were serious, since they had three young kids of their own. But finally we accepted their gracious offer and attended the retreat.

That weekend was a time of spiritual awakening for both of us. For the first time I understood the reality of the Holy Spirit, not just as an IDEA, but as a real, palpable presence. I know that if the leaders of that retreat had not been present, if the many people praying for the leaders and participants had not done so, I would not be a pastor today. It was that significant in my spiritual walk.

Woody Allen once said, “Eighty percent of success is showing up.” Lives are changed by faithful prayers and the presence of faithful people.

Rev. John Ed Mathison, Senior Pastor of Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church in Montgomery Alabama shares a story about commitment to being present as a part of stewardship:

At my church, we take the idea of presence very seriously. In fact, we ask people to write down the number of Sundays they'll attend in the coming year.... We've found that when people commit to be here, they follow through with what they said they'd do, no matter what. They know that when they're not at the service, there's no telling what they'll miss, what they would have been able to teach somebody, what they would have learned, how somebody might have encouraged them, or how they might have helped someone else. I'll give you an example.

A dozen or so years ago, a huge ice storm came through our city. It arrived on Friday, and it was looking pretty bad. Most churches in town announced that they wouldn't have services that weekend, because we were all supposed to be iced in for the next several days. At my church, however, wedecided we'd have church, and if people wanted to come, they'd come. I arrived a church around six thirty that Sunday morning. Ice was everywhere but I wasn't there alone. One of the first people I saw was an elderly member. I said, "Miss Lucille, I didn't expect to see you here today." Do you know what she replied? "Why?" I responded, "Well, it's so icy, and you have to have somebody to drive you, so I thought you'd decide not to come today." Boy, did she teach this preacher a lesson. She said, "John Ed, I didn't decide this morning to come today. If I had waited until this morning to decide, I wouldn't have come. It's too cold. But, you see, I decided last November when I turned in my commitment card that I'd be here forty eight Sundays. I know what four I'm going to be out of town, and this isn't one of them. I decided last November that I'd be here this Sunday in February."

Friends, this year we are going to ask you to commit to **praying** for our church and being **present** in our church. We will also be asking you to tell us what you estimate **giving** financially to the church. AND we will ask you to promise to **serve** Christ through our church's ministries. All of this will be on a card to be mailed out to you this week. We are not going to send a lot of letters or mailings. So please pay attention to this one!

We will provide you a brochure about the budget for 2008, which for the first time this year will include the work of the Trustees. Friends, we have expected the Trustees to care for our property without any budget! Some people have pledged and donated to the building, but they have never had enough money to really do the work we ask them to do! That's how we've ended up with major repairs and projects we can no longer delay! At a congregational meeting last summer, we authorized them to use a line of credit of \$550,000 to begin critical repairs. With a **significant** leap of faith and increased giving, we could stay debt free.

We'll have more to share with you over the next weeks. Please be sure to be **PRESENT** to learn more about stewardship. **PRAY** for the Finance team and the

congregation as we approach ministry in 2008. Pray and be present. Those are just a couple things- a couple simple things you can do for Jesus Christ and Baker Memorial United Methodist Church. But those couple things can change people's lives, and even change the world.

And remember, STEWARDSHIP IS EVERYTHING YOU DO AFTER YOU SAY, "I BELIEVE." AMEN!