

Sermon, Proper 17A

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sylvia.miller.mutia@gmail.com

https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp17_RCL.html

TODAY'S COVER ART



was created by parishioner Laura Richter in response to St. Mark's 2027 Stewardship Campaign theme, "Abide in love and bear much fruit" (John 15).

To read "Abide," this week's Stewardship theological reflection by Rev. Dr. Cynthia Geppert of the St. Mark's Spiritual Care Team, scan the "Theology Bite" article QR Code at right.



Today is a good day for Gratitude. We've got beautiful, original full color bulletin art (by one of St. Mark's "newer" members, Laura Richter). And in the Parish Hall we have a brand new Art Show entitled "Autumn Colors" that our Sacred Arts Guild has mounted yesterday. We've got a QR code in the bulletin that links to a new series of weekly theological reflection articles—"Theology Bites"—by Dr. Cindy, our Theologian in Residence. And—perhaps best of all—we're looking forward to sharing a delicious Pancake Breakfast in the Parish Hall today after Church. So many beautiful, sumptuous ways to celebrate and launch our Annual Stewardship Season.

[But, to say we are launching our Annual Stewardship Season is actually misleading. We are actually *not* launching our "Stewardship Season". Rather, we are launching our *new* "Season of Stewardship", namely our Annual Fundraising Campaign. If you don't understand how the "nuts and bolts" of church finances work, I'll give you the Cliff Notes: The ministry of St. Mark's is funded almost *entirely* by the donations of our members. So in order for the Rector and Vestry and Treasurer to build a realistic ministry budget for each calendar year they need to know what financial resources we, as a congregation, will have to work with—and so each Fall we invite every person in the St. Mark's Community to intentionally discern what financial gifts *they* feel called to commit to the work of God in *this* season in *this* place, so we can plan our annual church budget and ministries accordingly.]

As *vital*ly important as fundraising is, Stewardship is about *so much more* than just fundraising. Stewardship is Spiritual Discipline, and as such, it cannot be confined to any one season (That would be like saying, “I only pray in the Spring”. That would be ridiculous.) Stewardship is an *ongoing* process of intentional **reflection, discernment, commitment, and action**. “Stewardship” is a daily, year-round, life-long spiritual practice of **noticing, naming, embracing and sharing** the abundant and varied gifts that God gives to each one of us, in ways that align with our own vision and values—and with the vision and values of *God*.

Our Annual Summer of Conversation is a Stewardship Practice—as each one of us participates in intentional conversations with other individuals in the community, we are all growing as Good Stewards of our attention and relationships. Our Seasonal Ministry Rota is a Stewardship Practice—as each one of us intentionally considers how God is calling us (in each season) to serve and participate in the ministry of the Church, we are all growing as Good Stewards of our time and talents. Our Annual Fall Fundraising Campaign is a Stewardship Practice—as each one of us intentionally considers making a regular financial commitment to support the ongoing ministry of St. Mark’s, we are all growing as Good Stewards of our financial resources. In January, when we host our first End of Life Series with Dr. Cindy, that will be yet another Stewardship Practice—as we each consider the spiritual, practical, and medical decisions surrounding death, we’ll all be growing as Good Stewards of the ultimate gifts God has entrusted to us: our bodies, our legacy, our life itself.

At the heart of all our various Stewardship Practices is Love. Our Love for God. Our Love for Others. And, *above all*, God’s Abundant (Infinite!) Love for Us.

Today’s bulletin cover offers a beautiful reminder to all of us: “Abide in Love, and Bear much Fruit”---That is the theme for THIS season of our Stewardship Practice.

Because the Root of every Stewardship Practice is Love, I’d like to spend a few minutes this morning, considering what *today’s* Scripture Readings have to say about Love.

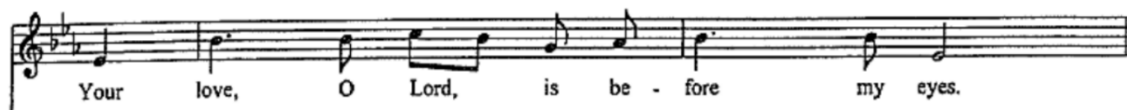
Today’s Epistle (Paul’s Letter to the Church in Rome) begins: **Let love be genuine.**

Which begs the question: What is love? What is GENUINE love?

In popular culture, the idea of “Love” can sometimes seem a little amorphous and intangible, variable and unpredictable. By contrast, in biblical terms, Love is entirely reliable. Solid. Dependable. Concrete. In today’s Psalm refrain, we sang together : ***Your love, O God is before my eyes.***

PSALM 26

Congregation sings refrain: "Your love, O Lord, is before my eyes."



Your love, O Lord, is before my eyes. Genuine Love can be SEEN, and HEARD and TOUCHED and TASTED (as well as FELT) . You may have heard it said: *"Love isn't a feeling. Love is a verb."* We come to know love through the loving action of God (and others) among us. And others come to know love through the loving action that we (with God's help) choose to manifest in the world around us.

Let love be genuine: Paul begins. Unsure what loving action God is calling you take? Well, Paul has a long list of suggestions (of course he does!):

Let love be genuine:...serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you... Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another...associate with the lowly ...

Your love, O God is before my eyes.

Today's reading from Romans is a beautiful description of the kind of community we are called to be—the kind of community that, in our better moments, we already are!

As I read through Paul's description of "genuine love" once more, I invite you to try to think of some actual examples from your own life. As I name each example of loving action, notice if any particular memories come to your mind—any moments when you've experienced [or caught a glimpse of] this "genuine love" at work in your own life, or in our life together at St. Mark's? When have you found love, right "before your own eyes"?

Paul writes: **Let love be genuine:...serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you... Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; ... associate with the lowly; ...**

Could you think of an example? What memory or image came to your mind? Take 30 seconds to swap stories with a person next to you.

Your love, O God is before my eyes.

I resonate with these words from today's Psalm (and I hope you do too):

Lord, I love your house, and the place where your glory abides.

Of course St. Mark's isn't the *only* place where God's glory abides. But it is certainly *one* place. This is one place where—if we keep showing up, with open eyes, and open minds, and open hearts, and open hands— we will see the Love of God at work, before our very own eyes— day by day, week by week, year by year, even from generation to generation!

St. Mark's is a place where we can practice SEEING love. This is a place where we can practice DOING love. This is a place where we can practice GIVING, and RECEIVING Love—in all its many, varied forms.

I want to conclude today's sermon by inviting you to join me in praying, the Collect of the Day (found on p. X of your Order of Worship). Together, let us pray:

Lord of all power and might, **the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works;** through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. *Amen.*
