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Stewardship Weekend Sermonettes – Year B

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First Lesson & Commentary

Who would you say is the main character in that reading, the one doing the most work? Being as I introduced this reading as the story of Bezalel and Oholiab, you're probably tempted to think about them. But actually that's not right, because they would never be able to do their work for God if it weren't for God first doing his work for them.

Did you catch that in the reading? No less than five times it says the LORD is the one who chose, gave, and filled Bezalel and Oholiab with the skills and abilities they needed to build all the furnishings for the new tabernacle after the Israelites' exodus from Egypt in the days of Moses. They were extremely gifted men it sounds like, able to do things with their hands that not just anybody else could. In fact, in the nation of Israel at that time, they were the two that the LORD handpicked for this task out of all the rest of the million plus that were with them.

Talk about some impressive credentials! But remember – these men were *gifted*. Their talents didn't come from them. They came from the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and he gave them for a reason: so that Bezalel and Oholiab could use those gifts in his service. See, when God gives us a blessing, he always gives it to us with a purpose. He gives blessings *to* us so that he can give blessings *through* us. Bezalel and Oholiab were men who had amazing gifts for design and craftsmanship, but he didn't give them those gifts to be hidden or hoarded. He gave them those gifts so that they could be shared and so our gracious God could be glorified.

And there's something for us to learn there, too. We have some very special people here at Good Shepherd who have skills and abilities and training that not just anybody else does. We have people who are big and strong; we have people who are very wise and intelligent; we have people who are very people-savvy and technologically-inclined; we have people who can do all sorts of construction and automotive and handyman work; we have people who are excellent with financial planning, budgeting, and investment; and of course that's only scratching the surface of the many gifts that God has given to his people here at Good Shepherd. God has given those talents as gifts of his grace, purely because he loves you and delights in you and because he wants you to be able to use them to provide for yourselves, your families, your community, and your congregation. God has given you those talents so

that you can serve those around you in love and glorify him in return for all his goodness. That's what he *wants* to see, and that's what he *loves* to see.

But did you also notice what our text said about maybe the most special ability Bezalel and Oholiab had? It was the ability to teach others. A great and wonderful blessing of God when his children work together is that we can help each other grow in our skill and knowledge so that we can serve God and our neighbors that much better. That's true in the teaching and work we do specifically through a Christian school, but it's not just that by any means. For me personally, I've learned an awful lot from being around God's people throughout my ministry. I didn't know how to build walls, or work with concrete, or change electrical fixtures, or replace faucets, or manage investments or a budget or a will, but I've learned thanks to godly, gracious people who were willing to teach me. It's just like that old saying, if you give a man a fish, you'll feed him for a day. If you teach a man to fish, you'll feed him for a lifetime. To share not just the benefit, but the ability of the gifts God has given us – especially the skills that not just anybody naturally has – that is one of God's greatest blessings and one of the best ways we can be stewards of the talents that he first gave to us.

But I know some of you are probably thinking, I don't have any of those special gifts. I can't do any of those things you just listed. So where do I fit in? Well remember, Bezalel and Oholiab were only two in a million, and they never would have been able to do their work if it weren't for the hugely generous, faithful support of all the people around them. No, it's not a matter of *whether* you have gifts or not. It's a matter of identifying *what* gifts you do have and finding a way to apply them in your life and in God's church. Yes, some people's gifts might be more obvious than others and more meant to be at the forefront, but sometimes those whose gifts make them more fit for behind the scenes support are really the most valuable. After all, it isn't the shingles and the siding – the parts you can *see* – that keep a house standing. It's the foundation. And you too can be the foundation of God's church when you stop worrying about what you *don't* have to give and when you start giving whatever you *do* have – maybe it's your example of love and respect for your spouse and children and neighbors, your dedication to growing in God's Word, your kindness, your patience, your service, your encouragement, your counsel, or whatever else it may be. You too are filled with the Spirit through faith, just like Bezalel and Oholiab. So friends, that means that you too have gifts to use in God's service, so let's use them faithfully, well, and to his glory.

Second Lesson & Commentary

There are talents and skills and abilities that not everyone has in service to the Lord – we just saw an example of that in Bezalel and Oholiab. This lesson, though, turns our focus more to the time and opportunities that everyone *does* have to serve the Lord, at least to some degree.

See, just as the body has many parts and is not complete and functioning at its best unless every last part is present and engaged, the Christian church works that same way. We have many different parts, many different people, and we all have different functions and skillsets to bring to the table. But what matters isn't whether one part is more useful or functional than the others; what matters is that when we are all here together doing the Lord's work and serving faithfully in whatever capacity he's given to us, every one of us is important and invaluable to the mission of God's church. Faithful Christian stewardship of our time isn't about *what* we do, at least not at its heart. It's so much more about just *being* there with everyone else and finding a way for everyone to fit together to complete the big, beautiful puzzle that is Christian life and service in this world.

Every puzzle piece is different, every body part is different, every Christian is different, and actually that's a good thing, because in God's plan being different is intended to be constructive and complementary. That's how God designed it to work in the body, Paul says, and that's also how he designed it to work in the church. It would do nobody any good for every part of the body to be the same. If our bodies were just a mass of eyes or a pile of ears, we wouldn't be able to function. And the same goes for Christians in the church. Variety is not only the spice of life; it's what makes our service that much more effective and fulfilling. Because we're all different, that means when we work together, we complete each other and we make something better together than we ever could apart.

But again, that takes time and investment, and taking time in this busy modern world means intentionally making time for service and stewardship. I don't have to tell you how busy we all are. But I also hope I don't have to tell you how much your God loves you and wants your commitment and how much we Christians need each other. We make time for the things that mean the most to us, so for the sake of our Savior, dear friends, let's make sure we're purposefully and intentionally making time to serve him. Whether it's ushering at church, or helping with

technology or Sunday School, or handing out flyers or pumpkins, or being a part of a congregational meeting or work day or committee or whatever else, prioritize it, put it on the calendar, and plan around it. There are all kinds of opportunities to take part in the mission and work of this congregation – just look in the service folder each week or check the bulletin boards in the narthex and you'll find ways to do that. Or if you have other, better ideas, that's great, too! In Christ's church, everyone has a place, everyone has a voice, and everyone has a part to play. It's just a matter of taking the time and seizing the opportunity.

So that means if everyone has a part to play, no one should think too highly of themselves or too lowly of themselves. Just like the eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you!" because they're both integral parts of the body with their own valuable contributions to make, so also none of us should look down on anyone else who might not seem as gifted or as engaged as we are. After all, we all have to start somewhere, so let's help each other learn that taking time for service is a joy! And just like a foot shouldn't feel bad about itself because it's not a hand, so also no believers among us should feel bad about themselves because they don't think they stack up to someone else. It is a wonderful privilege and dignity for every one of us to be a part of the body of Christ. He chose us specially and redeemed us with his own blood. He knows all his own, and he did not choose you by mistake. The King of all the universe gave you the time and opportunities that he has for a reason, and it's so that you can be his hands and feet and mouth in this world.

You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. In holy baptism, your Savior brought you into the family of faith, and if you are God's child, then that means he made you the way he did for a good reason. No, you might not always think you have much to offer Christ that will stand out from anyone else. But the truth is, everyone has something to give that no one else can: it's your time, your perspective, your support, and your experience. The Lord has equipped you specially to serve his church, and just like it is with the human body, so it is with the body of Christ: when every last part is united and engaged, when we're all in this together and taking advantage of the opportunities set before us, then the body is complete and functioning the way God wants us to in this world. So friends, let's appreciate each other for what we each uniquely bring to the table, and then let's be actively thankful for all the time and opportunities God gives us together.

Third Lesson & Commentary

Yes, I know what you're probably thinking. Money is a dirty word in church. People don't like to hear about it, they don't like to talk about it, they don't want it to *be* in church. And yet, there is nowhere more important to talk about money and how to use it than in the house of God, because he is the one who gives us our money in the first place and the only source that we can really trust for how to use it well.

See, we all have a sinful, selfish part of us deep down that doesn't want to follow God and would much rather take and hoard than give and share. But that's not what controls us anymore; Jesus has redeemed us and freed us from the power of sin and Satan and stockpiling *stuff*. That means we follow Christ in joy and love and thanks now, so let's try to get by that awkward discomfort right away. I'm not planning on shaking anyone down before you leave or making you hand over your W-2s. All I want is for us to open our hearts to listen to what our good and gracious God has to say about how we can best use the treasures he gives us and really grow in our lives of faithful Christian stewardship.

And the way Jesus did that in our Gospel lesson for today was by calling attention to a poor widow bringing her offering to God's house. It was festival time in Jerusalem, only a few days before Jesus would give his life as a ransom for our sins. The city was packed with people bringing offerings to the temple treasury to go toward the maintenance and service of God's house. It must have been a fascinating time to people-watch: many rich people coming forward, each giving more than the last, and all accompanied by trumpets blaring and backs slapping so everyone knew what they had done.

But in the midst of all that pomp and circumstance, in snuck a lowly, poor, old widow who had two measly copper coins to give, the smallest coins in circulation at that time, worth almost nothing in the grand scheme of things. But as she came with her offering, Jesus called his disciples together and used that widow's example to teach them something about our stewardship of the treasures God gives us.

The first thing Jesus wants us to learn from this widow is what truly matters about any of our offerings, whether they be talents, time, treasures, or anything else. It's not the material of the offering – the *stuff* our offerings are made of – or even the sheer amount that matters in God's sight. It's the attitude of faith that comes from a generous heart of love and thanks to God. This woman put every last cent she had into that offering box. It may not

have seemed like much, but whatever may have lacked in the size of her offering was more than made up for by the size of her trust. She may not have known exactly how, but she knew that God would take care of her and give her everything she needed, regardless of whether she had those coins or not. Truthfully, she wasn't just giving those few cents to God that day. She was giving her whole self into his hands, and our Savior promises that that kind of generosity and faith will certainly be blessed.

But then Jesus also uses this widow's example to teach us that, again, what matters in God's sight isn't the amount of an offering as such; it's the proportionality – God wants us to give in proportion to our income, true; but even more, he wants us to give in proportion to the love and thankfulness we have for him and everything he's done for us. All those rich people gave from their surplus, their *leftovers*. But this woman gave from her firstfruits; she prioritized supporting the Lord's work 100%, and Jesus noticed and loved what he saw.

So friends, let's learn this lesson about the privilege and joy that is generous stewardship of the treasures God gives us. God has blessed each of us richly, and now he calls us to return a portion of our blessings back to him in love and thanks and support for his Gospel ministry that's meant so much to each of us. See, for Christians, *not* giving back to God isn't an option. The Christ who was rich, yet for our sakes became poor so that through his poverty we might become rich, makes that unthinkable for us. God has been so good and generous to us, so how can we not be generous in return? Let's use our offerings to prove our love for our Savior and to support his work so that more and more can come to know Christ along with us.

Yes, ministry costs money, it's true. But what's also true is that the more money we have, the more and better ministry we can do together. So when you go home this week, I want you to give special thought to how you can best support the Lord's work here at Good Shepherd; maybe give thought to how you can help us complete some of the special projects that are in front of us – technology, air conditioning, flooring; and maybe even consider signing up for automatic offering donations that are dependable no matter the time of year or whether you can be here in person or not. So friends, whether yours is the widow's mite or the others' riches, let's all simply give God our best – faithfully, generously, and proportionately – because that's what he gave to us first, and we know that we can never out-give him. Amen.