

Time after Pentecost
The Reverend John H. Brock

May 25, 2008
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Isaiah 49:8-16a; Psalm 131;
1 Corinthians 4:1-5; Matthew 6:24-34

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

I live in Shepherdstown. Shepherdstown is a small hamlet just off Route 15. Head south on Route 15 and get off at Route 114 where it says Bowmansdale; turn left to go to Bowmansdale, turn right to go to Shepherdstown. It got its name back in 1828 from William Shepherd, although William Shepherd was not the original settler of Shepherdstown. But the village is still pretty much the same as it was in 1828. It starts at the top of the hill at the intersection of Gettysburg Pike and South York Street; the old Gettysburg Hotel (also known as the Union Hotel) sits at that corner. It then heads south down the hill and then back up a hill again (we're at the top of the second hill), over that hill are just a couple of more houses, and that's pretty much what Shepherdstown is. It's not really big. But we're in the historic district – that means that there was a building on our lot in 1824, and judging from the amount of repair work and improvements that needed to be done, that was our house there in 1824.

Recently a developer purchased about nine acres not exactly behind us, but behind and slightly to the south; the end of his development comes just to the back corner of our lot. He sent around a prospectus to all of us whose land abuts his proposed development, and leafing through this multi-page prospectus, I found lots of interesting stuff. One of the things, though, that I found most interesting was the fact that in his proposed development, unlike the development just over the hill in Meadowview where houses are “large”, shall we say, what this developer is proposing to put in this development behind my house is that those living spaces would be all 2,000 square feet or less. Now for those of you who are up on this sort of thing, that means he's making “smaller” houses. Those houses in Meadowview are well over 2,000 and may of them into 3,000 square foot range, which is way gonzo more space than my 1,400 square feet in my 200 year old house. But I will say that even in my 1,400 square feet, probably like many of those 2,000 and 3,000 square foot homes, we're pretty much filled with stuff. Most of that stuff I think I need. Although maybe I don't.

Now part of the reason this developer is wanting to build these smaller houses is that he is saying he wants to downsize. He doesn't want to have his kids to have to go through what he has recently gone through with his parents; he doesn't want them to have to go through all of his stuff (but I'll bet they're still going to have to). But I thought it was a good thing that he's trying to encourage people to live in smaller spaces and to get rid of the stuff that they don't need, the stuff that is in excess of their lives. I don't know that he would necessarily put it this way, but I think what he's trying to do with this development is in a lot of ways in line with our lesson from Corinthians this morning; this lesson that talks about Stewardships: the Stewardship of our lives, the Stewardship of our stuff, the Stewardship of our faith.

Okay. In this letter to the Corinthians Paul is writing to a really messed up congregation. There is in-fighting, there is back-stabbing, folks are putting one another down, they're bickering,

they're having sex with people they're not married to. In other words a lot like many congregations in North America. But all this is going on, and Paul writes to them about this concept of stewardship. He means faith issues. He's talking about being faithful to the gospel of Christ, being faithful to the gospel that calls us – calls us to love one another, calls us to look after those who cannot look after themselves, calls us to help the helpless, calls us to share what we have too much of with those who don't have enough.

I know that's not really what our culture tells us. "What's mine is mine!" is what we hear so often. I get so tired the bumper stickers, "the one who dies with the most toys wins." I have to struggle with myself. I know I want (but do I really need?) that 50 inch high def flat panel wide screen TV to go with the Blue Ray player and the 7.1 surround sound in my family room (which is, by the way, only 140 square feet)? Do I really need that? If I could just win the Powerball I'd never have to worry again. I could pay off all of my bills, I could buy what I want. I could be like the fellow from South Chicago Heights – you may have read about him, Bill Barantis, who not long ago got himself a custom-made casket in the shape of his favorite drink, which happens to be Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer (for me it would be a Mountain Dew can!). But, to quote the singer Don Henley, "You don't see no hearses with luggage racks".

So how much is enough? How many square feet of living space do four people really need? How many vehicles do we have to have? How many bicycles are needed for one family? Much as I might hate to admit it, how many times do we really, honestly, need to go down to DisneyWorld?

What do I need to do to be a good steward of my faith? Because, ya know, I have stuff. And I want to take care of my stuff. And I think it's good stewardship to take care of the things we have. But if I go out and buy a new guitar – which I would use at worship on Saturday nights (you are aware that we have a Saturday night worship service, right?) or take it down to Camp Nawakwa to help lead songs there. And even if I get a Martin guitar (which would help out the Pennsylvania economy, because Martins are made in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania), how much time am I going spend worrying about getting that new guitar banged up carrying it back and forth from my office to fellowship hall, or if I happen to forget and leave it in my car and it gets heat damaged?

Now our gospel text almost runs the risk of sounding like that great Bob Marley song from a few years ago, "Don't worry. Be happy." (Please, don't start singing it!). But remember how the passage started off? Jesus is talking about serving masters. And he says you cannot serve polar opposites. He is not saying that money is bad. He's not even saying that having money is bad. What he is saying is, it's what we do with our money. It's what we do with the resources we have at our disposal, because, too often those with a lot spend more time worrying about what they have, with what I have, and how am I going to hold on to it, rather than using what I have to aid those who are in need. Or as many of us who attended the Global Mission Event at Trinity this weekend found out, to help those who are in desperate need.

Those who attended the Global Mission Event learned of many ministries that are going on throughout the United States and around the world, and there are some really wonderful things that are being done by folks who do have enough who are helping those who don't. And that's

what we need to remember: that we are being called as folks who do have enough, to help the ones who don't. We're being called. We're being called because of our baptism. We're being called by the bread and wine we will share in few moments. We are being called by our faith, to take our faith outside of these walls. It's very easy and it's very wonderful, and I am very glad you are all with us this morning, thank you very much, but it is easy to be faithful in this place. It's not so easy once we go through those doors. Yet still, we are called to live that life of faith outside of these walls. We are being called to go home and look at all the stuff we have, and what we need and what we don't need. We are being called to look at our resources, at what we need and what we can share. We are being called to live that life of faith at work, to live that life of faith at school, to live that life of faith as we drive, to live that life of faith as we stand in line at the grocery store. We are called to leave this place, to leave this place, bearing in mind what the gospel says. We are called to go forth and be stewards: to be good stewards of our faith, to be good stewards of our stuff, to be good stewards of our time, to be good stewards of our money, to be a steward of God, no matter where we are, no matter what we do, in all that we do.

Amen.