

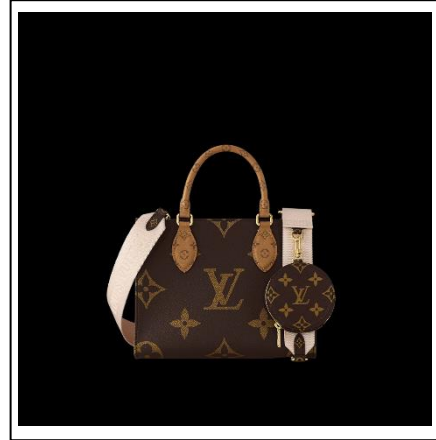
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October 08, 2023

The Church gathered at St. Mary's
Message from Michael Burke, Rector

Scripture readings:

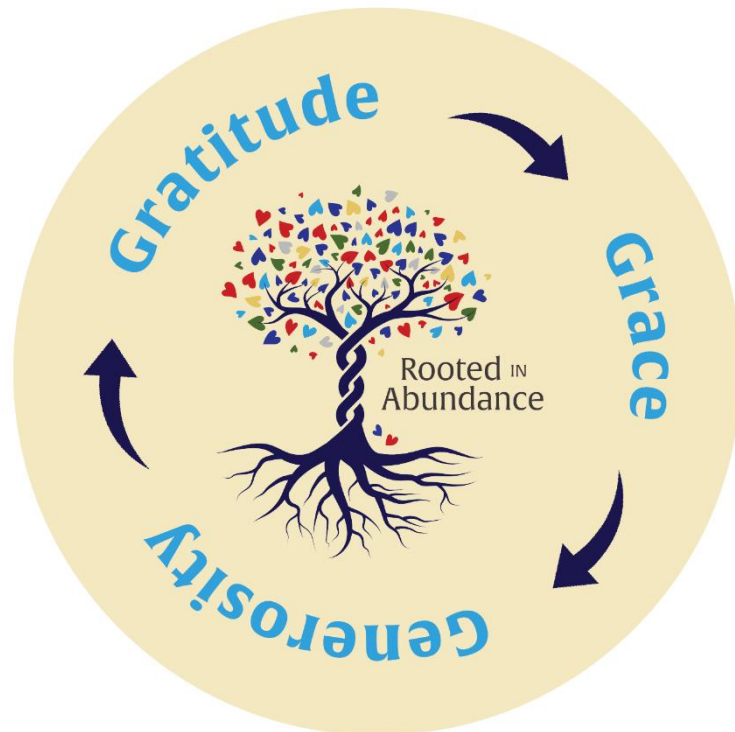
Deuteronomy 12:5-17; James 2:12-18; Luke 17:11-19



Friends, we are in the midst of stewardship season, where we celebrate that we are Rooted in Abundance – an abundance of ways to celebrate God's goodness; an abundance of opportunities to serve God and an abundance to meet the needs of the vulnerable among us and to make this world a better, more just, and more joyful place.

This is the yearly time, in the autumn harvest season, when we discern together what God is calling us to do in the year ahead, - 2024. This is the time of the year where we plan out the ministries and programs to come, build a budget that makes possible those things, and celebrate what God is doing among us.

Last week Al Alvarez shared his thoughts and reflections with us, and today, in just a few minutes, I will be asking Ron Pollock to come forward and do the same.



But first, I want to once again, root us in God's word, in the Holy Scriptures and our Christian tradition of faith.

And I'm going to make a bold claim:

To walk in the Way of Jesus is one of the most counter-cultural things you could ever do.

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And *one* of the places we see that; just one of the many places we see that, is in our relationship to money. To things. To "stuff."

I know. Didn't your momma teach you that there are three things we don't talk about in polite company? Money, religion, and sex. Well, we have the first two, money and religion. I really don't think I can squeeze sex in here, but then again, I'm not done yet. Keep hoping.

We were raised not to talk about money, but money drives everything in our culture. We even value things according to how much they cost, right? A Louis Vuitton handbag is more "valuable" than one your sister sewed for you. We work all our lives for our money. We lie awake at night worrying about our money. Our money is how we "keep score." Our money is one of the leading causes of divorce and relationship breakdown. And almost everything we learned about our money comes from the culture around us.

Are you with me so far? So, here's the thing.

It's all an illusion. Our faith teaches us that none of it is really our money anyway. Its all God's.

Everything we have – everything we work hard for and save for – it's all God's. All that we possess, all that we gain, all our talents, our ability to work hard, even the rain that falls from the sky and the sun which warms the earth – all things are God's.

The wealthiest man in the Bible – King David – whose wealth is today's dollars has been estimated to be \$200-800 Billion dollars, He was also fabulously generous, and it was David who said what we say each Sunday at the Offertory, *"Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, O God, and of thine own have we given thee."* – 1 (Chronicles 29:14)

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Do we have an image of this that we can share on the screen? (Screenshare)

This is what our culture will never teach you.
This is what our culture has no understanding about.

All things are God's. All we have is freely given by God.

And it is given to us that we might be have
GRATITUDE.

A deep and abiding sense of God's provision and goodness.

That God has placed those things which we have into our hands, not as things that we OWN, but as resources that we manage: partly, yes, for the sustenance and well-being of our families and loved ones, partly for the needs of those around us, especially the poor, the hungry, and the vulnerable. For the work of God in the world.

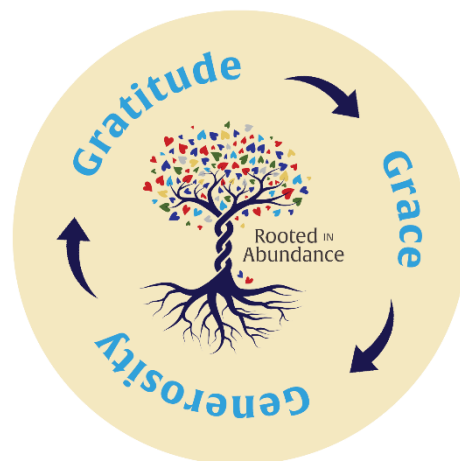
And so, we are GRATEFUL. And in being deeply grateful, we open up to God, we open up to the beauty of creation around us. We awaken to the sacred beauty within ourselves and one another.

And in awakening we are open to the thrust of God's GRACE in our lives. There is never a breath we can afford to waste. The beauty of God within and around and amongst us. Free from fear, for the perfect love of God casts out all fear.

And it is because it is to us that much is given, that we have the JOY in giving back. GENEROSITY. The gift of giving. To give as we have been given to. Without favor. Without merit.

Just as God has given to us. GRACE – from God, freely given

Begets GRATITUDE, a way of living, opening the way of freedom and life and a new way being in the world.



Begets GENEROSITY. Love is not love, until it is given away.

That's what the culture will never teach you.

This cycle, **Grace begets Gratitude begets Generosity begets an even deeper openness to Grace**, is one powerful way of explaining the life-cycle that is walking in the Way of Jesus.

And as we live and move each day through that liberating, life-giving cycle, we come closer to understanding Jesus. And knowing and to walking with Jesus in a whole new way.

That's all I have for today.

Please welcome one of our former Senior Warden's, our brother, Ron Pollock.

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The Gift (Bruce Cockburn)

These shoes have walked some strange streets
Stranger still to come
Sometimes the prayers of strangers
Are all that keeps them from

Trying to stay static
Something even death can't do
Everything is motion
To the motion be true

In this cold commodity culture
Where you lay your money down
It's hard to even notice
That all this earth is hallowed ground

Harder still to feel it
Basic as a breath
Love is stronger than darkness
Love is stronger than death

The Gift - keeps moving
Never know
Where it's going to land
You must stand back and let it
Keep on changing hands

Hackles rise in anger
Heat waves rise in sex
The gift moves on regardless
Tying this world to the next

May you never tire of waiting
Never feel that life is cheap
May your life be filled with light
Except for when you're trying to sleep

The Gift - keeps moving
Never know
Where it's going to land
You must stand
Back and let it
Keep on changing hands