

November 12, 2017

“Take Care”

Mark 12:28-34

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First of all let me acknowledge that presenting a meaningful message related to stewardship is difficult. Why? Well, at least from my perspective, for most people who have attended church for any length of time they have “heard it all before.” When I was a kid, you could almost sense a collective groan go through the congregation when it was “Stewardship Sunday.” I had to laugh at the response of the little boy in this story. The Sunday School teacher was just finishing a lesson on giving. “Do you know where little boys go if they don’t put their money in the collection plate?” the teacher asked. “Yes ma’am,” a boy blurted out. “They go to the movies.”

Every fall we enter into a time of stewardship and budgeting. I think it is easy to become desensitized to such messages, no matter how necessary or sincerely presented. I include myself in this boat. Today, I hope to bring some very familiar Scriptures and prayer into focus in a way that will energize us and just maybe give us a new perspective. The overall focus for this message is “Take Care.”

More than likely everyone here has either read or heard the expression Take Care. It is what we say or write just before we end a visit or sign a card. Take care has a positive connotation. We may wish the recipient to take care of themselves. We might be saying take care when one travels. It may also be an automatic response that does not have any particular meaning except to end a conversation or a written note; in that case it is very neutral. For today, I wish to use the phrase Take Care to be the thread that weaves this message together.

In the Bible, a steward was a person who was entrusted to take care of the owner’s holdings. A steward was an overseer of the owners’ property and finances. It could also extend to taking a role in the education and training of the children. Another word for steward could be a guardian. It was a position of considerable responsibility and accountability. In other words it is a person who takes responsibility to manage someone else’s holdings. In today’s first reading from Deuteronomy there are elements of stewardship.

In today’s reading from Deuteronomy the Israelites had been set free from slavery in Egypt, had wandered in the wilderness and now were about to enter

the promised land. In the Scripture it says in verse 12 “*take care* that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt , out of the land of slavery.” What struck me about the verses that preceded this is that the Israelites are entering a city with many amenities that they did not have to build. Notice that there are houses filled with all sorts of goods that “you did not fill, cisterns you did not hew and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant.” Like a steward, they are to be in charge of the amenities of the city and the crops of the fields that they did not have a hand in producing. In the bigger picture, these are not only the results of someone else’s labors, they are gifts from God. I think about that when I turn on the water and I have all I need; my well is not drying up. I think about the gifts of our fertile soil that produce the foods we eat. Here at Calvary, we give thanks for many of God’s blessings and that is as it should be. We are caretakers of what God first provides.

In the passage from Mark, we hear the very familiar two most important commandments: to put God first and to love ourselves and our neighbors. The statement by the scribe at the end of the passage is what made me first select this as the Scripture reading. He goes on to say, this is “much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” In essence get your priorities straight. So we have three ways in which to use this phrase “Take Care.”

- Take care of our relationship to God
- Take care of our relationship to ourselves
- Take care of our relationship to others

These three statements and our corresponding actions have a direct correlation to stewardship.

Worship plays a significant role in taking care of our relationship to God. We acknowledge God as holy and the center of our lives. We give thanks for our many gifts. We celebrate worship with our music. We participate in the sacraments. We pray for one another. These are central to the development and maintenance of our faith. I would venture to say that most of us here would agree that this is Calvary’s central purpose: taking care of and fostering a strong connection to God. With that as a basis, we can do a better job of taking care of ourselves. We gain spiritual strength here. We hopefully learn to forgive ourselves by trusting in the Lord who made self-forgiveness possible by first forgiving us.

With those priorities in place we then are able to do the second part of the commandment; take care of others. We do this here on Sunday and we continue this all through the week. I need not mention the many ways we support one another; it is a known fact.

We should not forget that these statements are not just nice to's, they are commands. Like the early Israelites, we enter into a covenant relationship with God, ourselves and others. We promise to do these things to the best of our ability and with God's help.

This sheds some new light on our stewardship. We enter into a covenantal relationship to be supportive to Calvary because of our commitment to God. Like our doxology we give thanks with a grateful heart.

Earlier in our service, Virginia Borg sang the Prayer of St. Francis. I find this a powerful prayer. I included it in our service because it felt like the actions in the prayer were the best examples of what

we are called to do with God's help. There is no price tag on love, pardon, faith, hope, light, or joy.

Each of us at one time or another will need these gifts and at other times we will find the strength to give them to someone. Community, that is what this message and the phrase "take care" is all about. Stewardship is one action of many that helps us become stronger Christians so we can give away what we have been given.

It is my hope that this message will revive our commitments and with an attitude of willingness rather than a grim resignation.

So, let us Take Care.