



Stewardship I: Remember the Table that Welcomed You
 Rev. Dr. Glenda Hollingshead; September 13, 2026
 16th Sunday after Pentecost
 Psalm 78:1-7; Luke 24:13-16, 28-32

This morning we begin a three-week stewardship campaign called *Love This Place Enough to Share It*. I'm really drawn to the title because it starts in a place that feels very different from the way we usually talk about stewardship. Stewardship can make us think about budgets and pledges and spreadsheets and making sure all the numbers add up. And, of course, those things matter. Churches need money to keep the lights on and the doors open and the ministries going. But stewardship is about something much larger than a budget. Stewardship is about how we tend to the life of a community we love. It's about what we've received, what we've been given to share, and what we hope will still be here for those who come after us. And so, for the next three weeks, together we will ponder what it means to *love this place enough to share it*.

Today we consider how love remembers—how we remember the table that welcomed us. If we hope to invite others into this community, it behooves us to first pause and reflect on what it felt like to be welcomed here ourselves. What did we find when we first came through these doors?

Who made room for us? What did it feel like to discover that there was a place for us at this table? And for those who were born into this community, what has it meant to have this church woven into your faith journey from the very beginning? Remembering these moments can help us recognize the gift of this community—and remind us why it's worth sharing with others.

I was nearing my final semester of seminary. God had made it clear that, whether I liked it or not, my call included preaching and being transplanted into another church family. The first step was to find the denomination to which I was being called. So, my family and I began a tour of area churches, a journey that would eventually bring us here to First Presbyterian Church, Jefferson City. It will come as no surprise to many of you that the first people to wholeheartedly welcome us were John and Eva Zirkle. We were struck by their open hearts and hospitality that would soon land us courtside at a Lady Vols game. Others in the church made us feel welcome including some who would, in time, become dear, dear friends. Soon, we realized that this was the place the Spirit had been leading us all along. So, on Easter of 2004, we became official members of this church. Much to my surprise, after graduation, I was offered a part-time position as an intern while I worked my way through the ordination process. I kept that position, in addition to working in the lab for Dr. Zirkle, for three years, until I was ordained here in July of 2007. Looking back now, I can see that what drew me here—what drew my entire family here—was more than a denomination or a congregation. It was a welcome. It was people who made room for us and, in doing so, helped us recognize that we had found a place where we could belong.

Psalms 78 begins with a call to remember and to tell the story. “We will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord.” The psalmist knows something important about faith: if we don’t tell the stories, they disappear. If we don’t pass them along, eventually someone will wonder why we are here at all. The faith of one generation becomes the memory of the next, and then that memory becomes a story that someone else can enter. “Tell to the coming generation,” the psalmist says. Tell them what God has done. Tell them what you have experienced. Tell them what you’ve learned. Tell them your stories.

Our gospel reading from Luke tells the story of the road to Emmaus. Two disciples are walking away from Jerusalem, trying to make sense of what has happened. Their hopes have been shattered. The one in whom they had placed their trust has been crucified. While they’re talking and trying to put the pieces together, Jesus comes alongside them. But they don’t recognize him. They walk with him. They tell him their story. They listen to him. Still, they don’t know who he is. It is only later, when they sit down at the table, that something changes. Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them, and suddenly their eyes are opened. They recognize him. The one they thought was gone is right there in the breaking of the bread. And then they say something so profoundly beautiful: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?”

Sometimes you don't recognize the sacred moment while you're living it. Sometimes it's only later, looking back, that you realize: Ah, that was the moment. That was when something changed. That was when I knew I belonged. I wonder if that's true for many of us in this church. Most of us probably have a story about the moment this place began to feel like home. Maybe it was your first Sunday. Maybe someone noticed that you were new and came over and introduced themselves. Maybe someone invited you to sit beside them. Maybe you came because you were looking for a church and discovered something here that you hadn't expected. Maybe it was a particular sermon or a hymn or a conversation after worship. Maybe it happened around a table over coffee or a meal. Maybe you were going through something difficult and someone simply stayed beside you. Maybe you don't remember exactly when it happened. You just know that somewhere along the way, this stopped being a building where you attended worship, or a church into which you were born, and became a place where you belonged.

That is the kind of memory Psalm 78 asks us to hold onto. Not just the history of an institution, but the stories of lives touched and changed. The people who taught us. The choir members who sang beside us. The elders who prayed for us. The people who cooked meals and unlocked doors, and folded newsletters (back when we had to do all that by hand). The people who may no longer be here with us in body, but whose fingerprints are still all over this place. There is something sacred about that kind of memory. Like tracing the grain of an old wooden table, you begin to see the marks left by hands that came before. Every congregation has those marks. Every congregation is built not only from bricks and mortar, but from the accumulated faithfulness of ordinary people. People who showed up. People who gave. People who prayed. People who taught children. People who brought casseroles. People who stayed late to clean up. People who noticed when someone was missing. People who believed that what happened here mattered. And we are sitting here today because someone, somewhere, set a place for us. That's worth remembering.

One of the things I love about this congregation is that we've always been good at cheering on the good work happening around us. We support nonprofits. We celebrate campus events. We open our doors to the life of this community. We have a generous spirit, and that is one of our greatest gifts. But I wonder if we have sometimes been so busy telling other people about the good things happening in our community that we've forgotten to tell them about the good things happening right here. We have thoughtful worship. We have meaningful service opportunities. We have conversations about faith that are honest enough to admit that we don't have all the answers. We have a place where faith is lived with imagination, compassion, inclusiveness, and a willingness to ask what the gospel means in the world in which we actually live. We have a community where you can come as you are. We have people who will learn your name and notice when you're absent. But there are people who live around us who don't know that yet. And that is where stewardship and invitation meet.

The earliest Christians understood this. In Acts, we are told that the believers “broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts.” They shared their lives. They shared their tables. They shared what they had received. And somehow, in the midst of all that sharing, “the Lord added to their number.” I don’t think the early church grew because they had a perfect marketing strategy.

I think it grew because there was something about the way they lived together that made people want to pull up a chair. And that is our invitation for these three weeks: Pull Up a Chair. Not: Come because we need more members. Not: Help us increase our numbers. Not: We need more money in the coffers. But simply: Pull up a chair. Come sit with us. Come share a meal. Come sing with us. Come ask your questions. Come be part of something important. Come and see what happens here.

And there’s no need to make it complicated. An invitation may be as simple as, “Come sit with me this Sunday,” or “You should see what our church does at Christmas Eve” or “We tried something beautiful in worship last week—I wish you had been there.” These aren’t sales pitches. They’re acts of love. When you love a place, you tell people about it. When you’ve found something that has fed your spirit, you want someone else to taste it, too.

I believe this church still has a future worth growing into, but futures don’t happen by accident. They are built by people who remember what they’ve received and decide it’s worth passing on. So today, before we think about budgets or pledges or numbers, I want us to remember. Who set the table for you? What is it about this congregation that you would want someone else to experience? And perhaps, sometime this week, take a moment to write down your responses. Maybe even tell someone. Maybe share it with us. Because our stories are part of the stewardship of this place. We’re not simply preserving a building or maintaining an institution. We’re carrying a story forward—a story about a God who keeps setting the table—about a God who invites us to do the same. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.