



Where The Heart Leads
 Rev. Dr. Glenda Hollingshead; September 28, 2025
 16th Sunday after Pentecost
 Psalm 104:24-34; Matthew 6:22-23

This is the Lord's Day—a holy day. Not because we have made it so, but because God's Spirit is here among us—breathing, stirring, calling us toward clarity and light. On this final Sunday of our Stewardship campaign, we are invited not simply to turn in a pledge card, but to turn toward a vision—a vision of what the world could be if we let God's light shine through us—if we dare to see with Spirit-led eyes—if we trust enough to take one faithful step forward—and then another.

In Matthew 6, Jesus says something that seems relatively simple: "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If, then, the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" Of course, Jesus isn't talking about eyesight. Jesus is talking about spiritual vision. He is talking about what we treasure, what guides us, how we see the world, how we perceive people and their needs, how we make meaning out of life. If our inner lens is clouded by fear of scarcity, or cynicism about the world around us and our place in it, then no matter how much light there is, we'll still stumble around in the dark. But if we see through the lens of love—if we focus on God's grace—if we fix our eyes on hope—then our perspective changes—and so does our heart.

While spiritual vision may come through many sources, one sure-fire source is an awareness of God's generous nature and our response to it. Gratitude has a way of clearing the fog and letting the light in. The psalmist in Psalm 104 is looking at the world with a lens of wonder, awe, and gratitude. Allow me to share the passage again, but from *The Message*:

What a wildly wonderful world, God! You made it all, with Wisdom at your side, made earth overflow with your wonderful creations. Oh, look—the deep, wide sea, brimming with fish past counting, sardines and sharks and salmon. Ships plow those waters, and Leviathan, your pet dragon, romps in them. All the creatures look expectantly to you to give them their meals on time. You come, and they gather around; you open your hand and they eat from it. If you turned your back, they'd die in a minute—Take back your Spirit and they die, revert to original mud; Send out your Spirit and they spring to life—the whole countryside in bloom and blossom. The glory of God—let it last forever! Let God enjoy his creation! He takes one look at earth and triggers an earthquake, points a finger at the mountains, and volcanoes erupt. Oh, let me sing to God all my life long, sing hymns to my God as long as I live! Oh, let my song please him; I'm so pleased to be singing to God.

This is a vision of someone who sees clearly—not just the beauty of creation, but the generous hand of the Creator behind it all. God provides in abundance. God renews the face of the ground. And when we see like the psalmist sees, we begin to realize: the natural response to divine generosity is to be generous.

Regarding the life and ministry of the church, generosity isn't just a duty. It's a response to God's love. To beauty. To goodness. To grace. And when we give, we're not only funding a budget. We are aligning our lives with God's generous nature.

Today is Stewardship Dedication Sunday, and in a few minutes, you'll be invited to bring your pledge to the Lord's Table. If pledging is new to you, let me explain what it means. A pledge is a promise, made in faith, of how much you intend to give to the church in the upcoming year. It's not a legal obligation—no one is going to come after you if your circumstances change—but it is a practical expression of your commitment to the life and mission of this church. It's confidential. It's flexible. And most importantly, it's between you and God—an act of trust and worship.

I didn't grow up in a tradition that had stewardship campaigns or asked people to make financial pledges. The tradition I came from was more inclined to rely on guilt and fear as motivators for giving. But as a Presbyterian, I've come to deeply appreciate the practice of pledging—for both practical and spiritual reasons. Practically speaking, pledging gives our church leaders a clearer sense of the church's expected income, which helps us build a realistic, responsible budget—ensuring that our ministries, staff, and programs are well-supported. It also helps us plan more confidently for new initiatives, mission efforts, and care for our building and grounds. But perhaps even more importantly, I've come to see pledging as a spiritual discipline. It helps Kinney

and me be intentional about our giving, to prayerfully consider how we feel led to support the work God is doing through this community, and to align that commitment with our personal budget in a way that reflects both faith and responsibility.

So, yes, I am all for pledging. But I also want to say this: while many in our church find pledging to be meaningful—not everyone chooses to pledge, and that’s okay too. For no matter how you give, your participation in the life of this church is deeply valued.

Because the generosity of this church is truly something to behold, I want to take a moment to name just a few of the ways your giving (through pledges and other financial contributions) makes ministry possible in this time and place. Yes, your gifts keep the lights on and pay staff salaries. But they do so much more. They fund the sacred behind-the-scenes: devotionals in your hands, art on our bulletins and newsletters, snacks for the kids, coffee for conversation, welcome packets for visitors, and a website that tells our story to the world. Your giving supports the work of every committee, and it supports missions—from PCUSA special offerings to 5 Cents a Meal, from Isaiah 117 House to local shelters. You stock shelves for Church Street Café, and you cover electric bills for neighbors in need. And oftentimes, you quietly give through extra donations—a ladder to safely deck our Christmas tree, a clothing rack to bring order to our upstairs storage room, a nursery worker for an Adulting Together event. You even turned artwork into stationery to launch our Retreat Fund—and now, a well-funded spring day retreat is on the horizon.

And beyond all that, you have given yourselves: trimming shrubs, weeding gardens, preparing meals, serving as liturgist or usher, teaching Sunday school, making music, fixing what’s broken, tending to sound and camera equipment—offering time and talent with quiet faithfulness. This is stewardship. This is community.

As your pastor, hear me when I say: God has richly blessed this church—with willing hearts, with helping hands—with you! And when you give—however—whenever—you become part of the vision and mission of First Presbyterian Church. Today, we are taking one more faithful step toward that vision. Through our presence, our prayers, our intentions, our contributions, we are saying: “I believe in a church where everyone is welcome at the table. I believe in a community where love is practiced, not just preached. I believe children should grow up surrounded by faith, and elders should never be forgotten. I believe the hungry should be fed, the grieving comforted, and the lonely embraced. I see something good happening here, and I want to be part of it.”

In just a moment, I invite you to come forward to bring your pledge card. If you don’t have one, extras are here on the Table. And, while you are up front, I also encourage you to light a candle as an offering of prayer—as a symbol that your life is part of something bigger—as a sign that you—a faithful follower of Jesus—you are the light of the world. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.