

Pentecost 22, 2025
Stewardship
St. Raphael's Church, FMB
Michael Rowe

In the Name . . .

The Collect for today asks God to make us “children of God and heirs of eternal life,” and to grant that, having this hope, “we may purify ourselves as he is pure.” In other words, we pray not only to believe in eternal life, but to begin living it right now — to let the hope of our future in Christ shape how we live, how we love, and how we use what we have in this present age.

That’s a good place to begin when we talk about stewardship — because Christian stewardship is about aligning our lives with the life that is to come. It’s about practicing, here and now, the way of living that belongs to the kingdom of God.

In today’s readings we hear, in different keys, the same great theme: God brings new life out of what has been broken or lost. In Haggai, the prophet speaks to a people returned from exile, staring at the ruins of the temple and wondering if the glory days are gone for good. “Take courage,” says the Lord. “Work, for I am with you... The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former.” What God rebuilds will surpass what was before — not because it will be grander stonework, but because it will be filled with God’s living presence.

That's a good word for us at St. Raphael's, isn't it? We, too, have lived through a time of rebuilding. The hurricanes took their toll, and for three years our stewardship, our giving, our work, have rightly been focused on recovery — restoring what was damaged, ensuring that we could gather again in this consecrated space. And you have done that faithfully, generously, sacrificially. Truly, God has been with us.

Now we are turning a corner. The physical rebuilding is mostly behind us, but the spiritual rebuilding — the growth, the outreach, the drawing of others into this community of healing and grace — that is still before us. And I believe, as Haggai said to Israel, that “the latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former.” The glory of God will dwell among us as we continue to open our hearts, our doors, and our lives to the world around us.

That's what financial stewardship serves. It is not simply maintaining what is, but investing in what God is bringing to life.

In the Gospel, Jesus meets the Sadducees — those who say there is no resurrection. That is why they are sad, you see?

They come to him with a trick question about marriage in the age to come, and Jesus completely reframes the conversation: “The children of this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age... cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God,

being children of the resurrection.” God, Jesus says, “is not God of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.”

Jesus isn’t just correcting a theological mistake. He’s revealing that our life in God does not end at our grave.. God’s promises don’t expire when this body wears out. All live to him. And that means that everything we do — how we love, how we serve, how we give — already participates in that eternal life. Every act of generosity, every pledge, every offering is a way of saying: We belong to the God of the living, and our lives will reflect that.

As we pray Eucharistic Prayer D, we give thanks to the God who “made all things,” and who, in Christ, is “bringing all things to their perfection.” That is the story of God’s love at work in the world — and it is the story of our stewardship, too. What we offer is taken up into God’s own redeeming work, until all things — our lives, our church, our world — are made whole in Christ.

Now, in practical terms, this is the time when we make our pledges for the coming year — our financial commitments to the ministry and mission of St. Raphael’s. Those pledge cards are statements of faith: tangible expressions of what we believe about God and about our own future. We are saying, “I trust that God will continue to provide for me, and I choose to participate in God’s work through the life of this church.”

The tithe — that scriptural call to give a tenth — has always been a sign of that trust. For some, giving at that level would be a real stretch, a costly act of faith. For others of us, it would be only a beginning. The principle is the same: that our giving is intentional, prayerful, proportionate, and joyful. Stewardship is about gratitude — gratitude for all that God has done for us, and confidence in what God will do next.

When we tithe, or move toward tithing, or beyond tithing, we are saying that our resources, like our lives, are not our own. They are gifts to be received, tended, and offered back. And when we give to St. Raphael's, we are fueling a ministry of healing, hope, and transformation — a place where people are drawn to Christ, where the wounded find healing, where faith is renewed. We are, quite literally, investing in the resurrection.

If we truly believe that our destiny is to share eternal, risen life in Christ, then our financial planning and our financial giving will reflect that destiny. Our bank statements, as much as our prayers, will show what we believe about God's future. We are children of the resurrection, heirs of eternal life. Let's live, and give, as people who know that.

So today, I thank you — for what you have already given, for what you continue to give, for the faithfulness that has brought us this far. And I ask you to consider, prayerfully and seriously, what your financial giving will be for the

coming year. Let it be a pledge that expresses hope, not fear; trust, not anxiety. Let it be an offering that says, “I believe that the latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, and I want to be part of that.”

Because the God who called us together, the God who rebuilt us after the storm, the God who raised Jesus from the dead — our God is still at work among us, making all things new. And as we offer ourselves — our souls and bodies, our time and treasure — we join in that work. We participate in resurrection life.

Amen.