

Sermon for Lent I 2009
Change for Change
By The Rev. Steve Fuller

Today I asked Carol to play one of the hymns that I looked at in Wonder, Love and Praise, otherwise known as the “Green Book”. Although I played music for many years in the band, I never learned to read notes. I can follow after I have heard the song played thru once, but I can not just sight read. So from time to time, I look at different hymns and the words speak to me. But, if the melody of the song does not, I wait for a time later that it may. Today, I am going away from the Gospel and want to pass along a message of Stewardship. Let me make this clear to those that think we, the stewardship team, never bring up stewardship. I can not make it any clearer than to tell you that this will be all about stewardship. Many of the sermons that I have given deal with Stewardship, in a hidden message. They may or may not deal directly with money. Today though, it does. Let me tell you why I feel this way today more strongly than any other time. A short while ago, I received an e-mail that came from one of our parishioners. In it, it mentioned stewardship and how we could move to many different levels of fundraising and that they could see Immanuel continuing and not closing the doors after the endowment ran out. Well that took me by surprise. I have always thought that the money would last forever if we managed it correctly

and could get pledges to move up. Yet, the cold hard facts are, we do not even pledge enough support to cover the heat bills let alone anything else that arises. So what can we and I repeat, we, do about this. After all, this is our church...

In the hymn I asked Carol to play are the following words:

“These three are the treasures to strive for and prize, be gentle, live simply and have the humility to shy from the struggle to put ones self first.” Ok easy enough to accomplish. If we take the time to look out for those around us that are struggling to make ends meet with the economy today and try to live our lives with less, we could start by putting others needs before those of our own.

We do this in part through outreach to the greater community in the world when Charlie reminds us each week to bring in our bottles and cans, thus sending the money raised to those we sponsor in Honduras. We put a face to the program with Kennet updates when Diana returns from Honduras.

Charlie has also arranged along with Beau, to take the cash receipts from Shaw’s that normally would have just ended up in the trash and turned them into tangible money for Immanuel.

“Be gentle and you can afford to be bold, be frugal and so have enough to be liberal, be humble and thus be a leader of all, this is the way.”

What comes from the inside of us may not always be what appears on the outside. So many times I have seen an issue come up, an issue that needs community support, both spiritually and financially, and money never appears to stand in the way. If people are asked to help, they become involved. It has to be done in a loving and respectful way though, not a demanding, overpowering, do it or else way. People just liked to be asked and included. They become part of the community and we can continue to grow. I have said more than once, I'm sure, that when new members decide to come and worship, we see a new face and we then try to overwhelm them and drive them away. I have also cautioned new members to not take on more responsibility than they want, too quickly.

In the last year or so before the November election, we all heard about change. Barack Obama reminded us, the American people, that the time for change has come. We elected him on this idea. He is a true visionary. He is one that when he was a little boy, could see himself one day becoming the president of the United States. How many of the true leaders of people throughout history woke up one morning, looked in a mirror or a stream, before mirrors, and thought, one day I will be a leader of many? Do you think one day that Jesus knew? JFK, knew? MLK, knew? Abraham Lincoln, knew? What appeared on the inside did not appear on the outside at first. It

had to develop over a period of time. They had to change the mindset of those around them to believe that what they thought the best for all could be accomplished with the help of all. One person leading a team of believers.

In the pew book holders this morning, if you look, you will find a clear, zip-lock baggie. I put these there for a purpose. I am asking you all to give change to change. I am asking you to take your left over pocket change at the end of each day and place it in this baggie. Each week bring the baggie to church with you and place it in the collection plate. I am asking you to take your change to change the financial outlook at Immanuel, one coin at a time. I would like to continue at least thru Lent.

No amount is too small to put into the baggie. I encourage the children to do it also. I have snack size baggies for those that want them. Using the clear baggies was done with a purpose in mind. What is inside does not appear to be the same on the outside. You will be able to see the change you are making at Immanuel. Those around you will also be doing the same, after all it is our church...

This past Tuesday night, we celebrated Shrove Tuesday with a pancake supper, festive even song and burning of the palms to prepare for Ash Wednesday. This was very well attended and many of the children stayed to

help with the burning of the palms. Most of the adults continued the Mystics program and were unable to see the faces of the children outside. These are the faces of the future of Immanuel. It was a chance for all who were able, to come together at an evening service, to eat together, something we Episcopalians do very well and develop a sense of community, something that has been lacking lately at Immanuel. My hope is that we can continue to do more events like this. Can we bring new members to another dinner or breakfast, once a month? Do we have enough energy to prepare dinners for the wider community and charge money as a fundraiser monthly during the summer? Many area churches do just this and it becomes a weekly event to many of the seniors who might not otherwise get out. We have attended many community dinners with family in Alstead and East Alstead with lines heading out the door if you do not get there early enough. To these churches, it may be their only form of fundraising they have. If we do not start with small events such as these, where will we be in the future? Hopefully our economy will turn around shortly and we will begin to recover some of the losses the Wilks Fund has endured. Even so, is it too soon to begin to plan on community building and growth without relying on a fund left to us almost 60 years ago?

“Through gentleness, those who attack win the fight, and those who defend have their safety in gentleness, this gentleness rests in the children of God.”

AMEN