

Open that treasure box! January 22, 2022

By Rev. Jenny for St. James in St. Marys

The other night, I watched a movie on Netflix called One Week. It is a story of a young man who is given a terminal cancer diagnosis and buys a motorbike and heads off across Canada to find himself. It is a very thought-provoking movie and I would recommend it.

It got me thinking about what I would do if I received a terminal diagnosis. Having spent a week in the hospital recently also allowed those thoughts to bubble up to the surface. In the movie, the man was young and had his whole life ahead of him. He was about to get married.

But as we head into towards our annual Vestry meeting, it had me thinking in another way. What if our church had a limited time on earth? Not just our little church, but The Church. What would we do? How would our actions change? Well, it is. The Christian Church in the Northern Hemisphere is certainly struggling. The number of people who attend Church is plummeting. Churches are closing.

It is hard to think globally though. Let's bring it closer. In our own diocese, Bishop Todd is having to deconsecrate churches who have come to the end of their time. Because of lack of resources, they are no longer able to carry on. They do not have enough time, talent or treasure needed to carry out the day-to-day activities of a church. They cannot afford a minister. They cannot afford a building. They do not have people to clean the church, or be wardens or council members, or to set the altar. They do not have anyone who can shovel the walks or paint the walls or fold the bulletins. They do not have choir members or a musician. They do not have anyone willing to go to regional council. They do not have synod representatives. They do not have any children or Sunday School teachers. No one is available to read the scriptures or greet people as they arrive at church. They do not have the money to fix things that wear out. They do not have the time, talents or treasures to carry on.

And it is heartbreaking. God Himself weeps to see what is happening.

God gave His only begotten Son and we struggle to give of the time, talents and treasures He has so graciously gifted us with.

What would you change if this church was given one year to live? Would you fight for it or walk away? This church is us, the people. The building is just a building which without us would just be a pretty building. Are we committed to continuing or are we ready to let it go? If we are committed to continuing, what is it we are committed to?

Jesus stands up in his home synagogue and opens the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah and begins to read. And what Jesus reads is actually His mission statement: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

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Jesus has a job to do. He is called to bring good news to the poor, release captives and help the blind see. He is declaring it to be the year of the Lord's favour. Jesus was born with this as His mission in life. It was confirmed at His baptism.

We too have been given a task to do in our lives. We were given a treasure at our Baptism. We have been a gift that we are meant to share with others. It is worth taking time to discern what your gift is that God has given you.

Churches are closing because people are not making use of the treasure that God has gifted them with. We always have that choice. But we are seeing the results of that. It takes more than just one person to keep a church running. It takes people willing to use the gifts in their personal treasure box for the good of all.

Now I am not just speaking about money. It takes far more than just money to keep a church alive. Many churches close with money in the bank. What keeps churches alive is a knowledge of their purpose. Why are we here? Why is this Parish of St James important in St Marys, in God's Kingdom? Are the people utilizing their God given gifts to benefit the church and God's Kingdom?

As we gather on February 6th to have our annual meeting, let's do more than just look at the finances and try to find bodies to fill the positions on council. Let us reflect Christ right in our meetings. Let's think about what we are doing or not doing. Let's offer up our time, talents and treasures to ensure this is not the last year of our churches nor the end of Christianity in the Northern Hemisphere. Let's get excited about the year to come and make it our best yet. Let's have meetings filled with joy that reflects Christ. Let's come up with ways to share with our community our joy, love and fellowship.

Let's find a way to give of our time to keep our church running. Perhaps we can give an extra hour a month. Maybe we can give an extra hour a week. Maybe it is just an hour a year. Each of us can find some extra time to offer to God.

Each of us has talents given by God that can be used to help God's church continue. Maybe it is a talent to clean. Maybe it is a talent to sing. Maybe it is a talent to be the treasurer. Let's look deep down inside and see what we can give to God of the talents God has given to us.

Of course, we also need to give out of our treasure. Without cash, we cannot exist. As well as inventorying our time and talents to see where we can give more, we also need to take a look at our treasure. A Tim Horton's coffee is about \$2. Could we give that much extra a week and skip one coffee? A movie night is easily \$10. Is it possible to give that to the church instead? Each of us has to look at our own situation. Some are able to give 10% but not everyone can. We each just got our tax statement. What percent of your income goes to the church? Can you raise it by even 1%? When was the last time you reviewed the amount you give to St. James?

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Everything we have came from God. Our time, our talents and our treasures. We are truly blessed in so many ways. We are not yet on the brink of closing. But it is getting harder to find people with the time and talent to do the jobs that need to be done to keep us going. It is harder to make our money stretch so that we still can help the needy.

Let's take the time to prayerfully open up our treasure boxes that hold our time, talents and treasure and see what we can find. Of course, the best solution is to increase the number of people who come to our church but until that time, the solution to our difficulties can be found in our treasure boxes. Lift the lid. You might be surprised at the wonderful things you can find!

Today's reading from First Corinthians holds an important passage about how the Body of Christ, the church, is to live out the mission statement of Jesus. As we strive to keep faithful to those words Jesus read aloud and lived out, we can pay attention to three points that St. Paul insists on in that passage.

Number One: *All members of the church have gifts for ministry. That is right. ALL.*

Number Two. *The members of the church have different gifts for ministry; we are not clones of each other.*

Number Three. *The different gifts come to life in the context of the whole.*

Jesus read the old words from Isaiah and claimed them for his own. We can do the same. Please repeat after me, out loud, right where you are, sentence by sentence:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us.

The Spirit of the Lord has anointed us to bring good news to the poor.

The Spirit of the Lord has sent us to proclaim release to the captives.

The Spirit of the Lord has sent us to help the blind recover their sight.

The Spirit of the Lord has sent us to free the oppressed.

The Spirit of the Lord has sent us to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in our hearing. Amen.¹

¹ Based on part of a sermon by the Rev. Charles Hoffacker;

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/jesus-mission-statement-epiphany-3-c-january-23-2022/>