

January 23, 2010 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
Matthew 24:45-46 & 25:21 “Valuing the Valuable: Living Faithfully”
by Andy McDonald

Last week I began the sermon talking about Haiti and it is important as we move another week beyond the earthquake there, that we remember the people of that island nation. Last week we said they were estimating 50-100,000 dead but now the death toll is over 200,000.

For perspective, according to the US Census Bureau’s 2006 estimate, while the greater metropolitan area is much larger, the population of Orlando itself is 220,186. In the past 11 days Haiti has experience the cataclysmic death of nearly the number of people in our city.

Prayer

Sometimes in the church we have equated service with sadness! That we must sacrifice and be just a bit miserable if we are serving God at an optimum level.

Singing that old hymn “All to Jesus I surrender” can create a sense of fear of what that might mean.

I remember hearing return missionaries telling stories of deprivation and sacrifice on the mission field. And I wondered if that was to be my fate if I surrendered all to Jesus.

We sing that newer praise song, “Lord I give you my heart I give you my soul, Lord have your way in me.”

And the words sound nice and the tune is pleasing but the sentiment, the commitment of surrender is scary. Because there’s this crazy fear that God will suck all the fun, and joy, and happiness out of our lives—like He is some almighty spoil sport who will rain on the parade of our lives. Sure heaven will be great because we will have been transformed to be really holy, but for now being holy in our un-holy world we imagine must also mean being un-happy here.

I'm not talking about sacrifice. We all know that to accomplish anything of value, to invest ourselves in any cause, will mean sacrifice. Everything comes with opportunity cost. I have \$15 bucks and I can either buy a shirt or a CD. If I buy the shirt the opportunity cost is the CD and if I buy the CD the opportunity cost is the shirt. However I spend my \$15 I lose the opportunity to purchase the other item.

When we serve God and invest our time and energy in helping people or making a ministry stronger or more effective by our participation, there are always opportunity costs. To spend 4 hours preparing to teach a Sabbath School Lesson may not seem like a sacrifice to a person who loves doing that kind of thing, even for that person though there is the cost or sacrifice of whatever else they could have done with those 4 hours. Sacrificing our lives for others doesn't necessarily need to draw blood, but it will involve self-denial of everything else we could have been doing with our resources at that time.

But when a person who loves to knit is making an afghan for someone the "sacrifice" of time, the opportunity cost, isn't something they take on begrudgingly, but the love of the person for whom they are making it may remove completely any sense of sacrifice although there is one.

The book of Hebrews tells us, Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2

I believe that it is possible, when I'm acting in concert with the way that God has wired me; acting in harmony with how I am fearfully and wonderfully made, that much of what we've conjured up as the pain of serving can be mitigated by the joy of serving.

I want to ask Shawna about this. Shawna is a person who dreams about our church full time and we pay her part time to actually work

on helping us identify our strengths, connect to a ministry area, and serve.

Shawna, What's your dream your vision for your church? What's your wish? What is it that you want to see become our new reality?

(Shawna will talk about developing a “strengths based culture” where each member gains an awareness of how God has wired them. Equipped with this better self-understanding, they will connect with a ministry area, and then they will serve, giving themselves away, investing in making a difference)

Thank you Shawna—What a great dream for God's kingdom.

Open your Bibles with me to a great Old Testament story that teaches us how God works. If you don't have your Bible the texts will also be projected on the screen. We are going to look at Exodus 35 beginning with vs 20. Exodus is the second book in the Bible so you will find it near the front, Genesis then Exodus. Chapter 35:20 and I'll be using the New Living Translation.

Let me set up the story. Moses, the leader of Israel, has been up on Mt. Sinai getting instructions from God. He's come down now and explained to the people God's instructions about how to build a big tent tabernacle, what it would look like, its size, and furnishings etc.

We pick up the story in vs. **20 So all the people left Moses and went to their tents to prepare their gifts. 21 If their hearts were stirred and they desired to do so, they brought to the LORD their offerings of materials for the Tabernacle and its furnishings and for the holy garments.22 Both men and women came, all whose hearts were willing.**

Remember last week in part of the sermon we talked about three good reasons to give.

The first good reason to give was because God convicts us to give. I think this is what is being referred to here as “their hearts were

stirred.” It was more than a whim. They were convicted to be participants in the plan.

Maybe you’ll remember the second good reason to give is that you can do so cheerfully. You aren’t just a joyful giver but you recognize that your giving actually increases your joy. We see this here. Not only were “their hearts stirred” but, they were not just convicted, but they desired to do so, all whose hearts were willing.”

The third good reason to give is if we have the gift of giving. All are invited and there is an expectation that all will give something. But I reminded us last week that some people have a spiritual gift of giving and they give above and beyond and it is almost more difficult for them to not give than to give. Undoubtedly some brought a little and some brought more. We continue in vs 22

Some brought to the LORD their offerings of gold--medallions, earrings, rings from their fingers, and necklaces. They presented gold objects of every kind to the LORD. 23 Others brought blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, fine linen, or goat hair for cloth. Some gave tanned ram skins or fine goatskin leather. 24 Others brought silver and bronze objects as their offering to the LORD. And those who had acacia wood brought it.

2 Notice what they brought—not the items themselves but the last words of vs 24 “Those who had acacia wood brought it.” Whether gold, silver, yarn or whatever, THEY BROUGHT WHAT THEY HAD!

Just like God had placed these physical resources in their hands, all of our resources physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual. All of our life experience and education and learning. All combine to make us just one of a kind and like Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe said, “The person born with a talent they are meant to use will find their greatest happiness using it.”

25 All the women who were skilled in sewing and spinning prepared blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and fine linen cloth, and they brought them in. 26 All the women who were willing used their skills to spin and weave the goat hair into cloth. 27 The leaders brought onyx

stones and the other gemstones to be used for the ephod and the chestpiece. 28 They also brought spices and olive oil for the light, the anointing oil, and the fragrant incense. 29 So the people of Israel--every man and woman who wanted to help in the work the LORD had given them through Moses--brought their offerings to the LORD.

Everyone who wanted to help had opportunity.

Everyone who helped did so from within the resources unique to them.

What has God put in your hands? In your mind? In your heart?

When God was speaking to Moses who was skeptical about leading Israel out of Egypt do you remember what God asked Moses? He asked, "Moses, what do you have in your hand?"

For Moses it was a shepherds staff, a walking stick.

Listen, the God who is faithful, who makes us what we are, comes to each of us in his calling, and he asks each of us, "What do you have in your hands?" In this story he didn't expect gold from the person who had a tent full of yarn. He didn't ask for yarn from the guy who only had a stash of silver. He didn't even ask for gold from the person who had bronze. "Each brought what they had."

God doesn't want you to be somebody else. He just wants you to be you, uniquely you—redeemed by his grace but still you. You bring to the body of Christ what no one else can bring. With you and your participation the body is better without you it is less than ideal.

30 And Moses told them, "The LORD has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, grandson of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. 31 The LORD has filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God, giving him great wisdom, intelligence, and skill in all kinds of crafts. 32 He is able to create beautiful objects from gold, silver, and bronze. 33 He is skilled in cutting and setting gemstones and in carving wood. In fact, he has every necessary skill. 34 And the LORD has given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach their skills to others. 35 The LORD has given them special skills as jewelers, designers, weavers,

and embroiderers in blue, purple, and scarlet yarn on fine linen cloth. They excel in all the crafts needed for the work.

Chapter 36:1 Bezalel, Oholiab, and the other craftsmen whom the Lord has gifted with wisdom, skill, and intelligence will construct and furnish the Tabernacle, just as the Lord has commanded.

Vs. 3 Additional gifts were brought each morning...finally the craftsmen (met with Moses and said,) “We have more than enough materials on hand now to complete the job the Lord has give us to do!”

God is transforming you into his very image. Using our gifts we as the Body of Christ, don't just consume God's blessing but we become Jesus to our world.

God has given us everything we need for doing his will. As we let him make us channels for resources, for skills, for talents, for intelligence we partner with him and we have more than enough of all that is needed to complete the job the Lord has given us to do!

We can effectively love people into a life-long friendship with God, and God will bring people to become followers of Jesus Christ because of our combined ministry.

Here's what I want. I want us to look in the mirror. To really work to IDENTIFY how God has wired us, our gifts, our life experience, intelligence, to IDENTIFY our strengths—what are we good at. And then CONNECT our unique combination of all that makes us who we are to CONNECT with some ministry area for which we have a passion and then SERVE—each other, our families, our communities to be Christ to our world. As we identify, connect and serve what was true for Israel in the wilderness building a tabernacle will be true for us in the 21st century as we build the body of Christ, “We will have more than enough of all that is needed to complete the job the Lord has given us—to love people into a life-long friendship with God.”

I want to close with a famous quote from Maianne Williamson's book “A Return to Love” She writes:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous—actually, who are you not to be. You are a child of God. Your living small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God within us. It is not just in some of us it is in everyone. And as we let our light shine we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same!”

That’s what I’m talking about. Identify your strengths and live large. Connect who you are at your very best with some ministry about which you are passionate, and Serve—join with Jesus in giving your life as a ransom for many.

And the Lord will add people to his kingdom!