

“What’s Mine is God’s”

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First Congregational UCC, Gaylord, MI

Based on Brian McLaren *We Make the Road by Walking, Chapter 38, The Uprising of Stewardship*

Texts: Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 and 2 Corinthians 8: 1-15

In a couple of my former congregations, we didn’t sing the doxology after the offering. Instead, we sang a song called, “We Give Thee but Thine Own.” It goes like this:

We give Thee but Thine Own.

What e’er the gift may be.

All that we have is Thine alone.

A trust, O Lord, from Thee.

While hiking on the trail in the past couple of weeks, I got to thinking about how it is we look at the things of this world: the earth itself, money, family, church...really everything. We often think about all the things in our lives as ours that we control what we want to do with them. Even in the church, when we talk about tithing, we talk about giving to God “our first fruits.” While I don’t dispute that we should give to God first, I would add a word. We should give **back** to God first.

Giving back to God would help keep the right perspective that all that we have, all of who we are, all that we do, comes to us as a gift from God. In word, everything is God's. Everything belongs in the world. Everything belongs to God. I thought on that hike (and since) what would it be like if people of faith not just thought about, but lived, as though everything in the world indeed belongs to God. What if God shares with us first and then calls on us to share with others? Would we live any differently?

What if God gave me the trail I was on that day? Not just the trail itself, although it was built through the tremendous gifts of everyone involved, both financial and human brains and brawn, but God also gave me the river that flowed by, and the trees, and the birds that sang, and the air that I breathed in. God shared with me everything that was around me. Not only could I be grateful, but I believe I treat the world with more respect when I keep it clear to whom everything belongs...and it's not me...and it's not you...it's not even all of us. The world, and all that is in belongs to God. God, in turn, shares it with us and invites us to be stewards of all that is around us. Not only our money, but everything. Intellectually, I believe that you agree with me. As people of faith, you would agree that God owns the world. Not matter where you come down on evolution

or creation arguments, people of faith believe God was and is the architect, creator, and owner of all that is.

What I'm calling for is not intellectual assent. It's nice when you agree with me. I like it when you agree with me. I like to agree with you, too. Having said that, nothing changes in the world if all we do is intellectually agree to things. Right action should and hopefully does follow right thought. How would we live and act differently if got beyond assent and got to living as if everything we have is shared first by God with us, and then we're called to be responsible for, or to steward, to those gifts? I don't want to take how we manage our money out of the stewardship equation, but I do believe it's part of a larger life practice. When we live in gratitude, we are much more likely to be gracious to others. I found in my own case that as I was contemplating, I was intrigued to know how would I act differently if I lived as though everything around me is God's?

I found out that I literally changed. I was much less willing to waste time when I believed that the time I have is really God's. I was more compassionate toward other people when I realized that they belonged to God, even if they didn't acknowledge that. It didn't matter to me so much whether were like me or not, instead it was, "they belong to God, even the annoying ones!" and therefore,

I will treat them with respect. The land on which I hike is God's, therefore, I will not despoil it.

Brian McLaren, in the book we are studying together called *We Make the Road by Walking*, writes in this chapter on stewardship that "Stewardship applies to all areas of our lives – how we use time, potential, possessions, privilege and power. Whatever we do, we try to give it our very best, because we work for Christ and not just for money." In large measure I agree with him, but I would change the language by adding the word God to the first sentence. "Stewardship applies to all areas of our lives – how use God's time, potential, possessions, privilege and power that were shared in and through us."

I don't know if this would affect others like it did me. But I wanted to share with you that I found myself experiencing a rather profound change in how I thought about everything that is so-called *mine*. If what is mine really doesn't belong to me, but is managed by me, I not only feel more responsible about how I use it, but I also think about how I acquire those things that I'm told I possess. If my talents are really God's but housed in me, how would I use those differently? Heck, how would I view them differently? If they're God's, then they are good, and maybe I don't have to sell myself short and not share all of who I am with the

world around me. If I am God's and everything belongs, and my gifts, talents, money, family, home...all belong to God, then I'm not using those gifts well not to share them. It's not God's judgment I'm worried about. I think you know already I don't spend much time on God's judgment. It's the other way around: If God loves me this much and gave me these things how can I not share them with the world? Sharing what I have with the world is my way of saying thank you for what God shared with me.

Like I said, I don't know if this will have the same effect on you it did on me. But I invite you, even for a week, to try and look at everything in your world, no exceptions, as belonging to God and see if you naturally treat them differently. McLaren also shares with us in this chapter that stewardship is, really, love in action. God's love took action to put you here and gifted you the way God has. Now what will we do with that love? If we really lived out our belief that the world and all that is in it belongs to God, I think we'd see a significant change in the world. I invite you to challenge yourself to live this way more and more. See if it changes anything in your life. Are you happier? Are you freer? Are you more loving? Do you share better? Do you not argue about things so much?

If nothing changes, you can also go back to the old ways where what's yours is yours, what's mine is yours, and God gets a portion of what **we** own.

Then we could sing the offering song this way:

We give Thee but our own.
What e'er the gift may be.
All that we have is ours alone.
Just ours, O Lord, you see.

In the many, many blessed names of God, from whom all things come.
Amen.