



November 4, 2020

So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us. 1 Thessalonians 2:8

Dear ones,

I've been reflecting on my three years at St Barnabas, on the connected community I was welcomed in to and on the ever-deepening connections our community continues to make, even in the face of the current COVID and racial pandemics, even in the face of rampant civil discord. I've been thinking about the profoundly different way we've been called to be church in these last 8 months and in the months to come. There is no end to my gratitude for your faithfulness and your willingness to jump into new technologies, venture into a virtual coffee hours, women's groups, men's groups and supper clubs, to film yourselves and your children offering the readings of the day, and to continue to care for each other and for neighbors across our island, the county and the world. St Barnabas is an amazing community, and I can think of nothing better to celebrate, than the uniqueness of each one of you and the beautiful, collective community that is St Barnabas!

When church leaders came together to talk about a theme that would guide us in 2021, we were quick to land on "*Celebrating Community*." We celebrate community in different ways, these days, but we continue to celebrate each other and to celebrate with each other. We are a community that knows church is not our beautiful, beloved building, rather the church is us, the community that now gathers on-line, via text, by telephone, email, handwritten cards and livestream. We are the gathered community and we always will be. What a gift that is. At St Barnabas, we've moved from what Bishop Rickel affectionately calls "The Annual Beg-a-thon" to the understanding that stewardship is not a season. Stewardship is the Christian way of life. Stewardship is not the money we give to the church. Stewardship is the recognition that everything we have is gift from God and that we are caretakers, not owners. Whether it be the land we live on, the family we share, the work we do each day, the unique talents we cultivate or the money passing through our lives, as Christians, we recognize God as the source of all that we are and all that we have and that what has been given into our care, is to be cared for. Stewardship is a way of life.

The ancient tradition of offering to God the first fruits of our lives and labor is helpful as we do the good work of discerning what we want to offer as our annual pledge. Our giving ought not to be what is left over after we figure out what bills need to be paid, as difficult a concept as that

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may be to grasp. Our giving to God really ought to be what we first decide, the very first gift. You may know that in my former life I was a business manager, so you may be assured that I understand financial realities and the need for a budget. But I also know that the point at which I decided I was going to tithe and then make the rest my financial situation work, was one of the most freeing and happy moments of my life. I didn't need to think about it anymore, I had been set free to give.

And that, my dears, is really what it was – *I had been set free to give*. I'm sure you've heard the saying "Give until it hurts." But that is utterly antithetical to my experience of giving. I think what God wants for us is the unspeakable joy that comes when we give until our hearts sing because our gift is truly a reflection of our gratitude to God. God won't love us any more if we give \$25,000 than if we give nothing. That's not at all the point. God doesn't need our money! Our giving is about our gratitude. It is for our joy and spiritual well-being. Our giving is a spiritual exercise.

There are two spiritual exercises contained in this packet, and I heartily encourage you to take them up. Let your giving to the 2021 Annual Pledge Campaign be a true celebration of the community that is St Barnabas and a true reflection of your gratitude to God. That isn't about an amount, it is about a state of mind and heart. Pandemic times have had a big impact on some of us and a small impact on others – we know that. Again, your giving ought to make your heart sing. And whatever your circumstances, please don't feel like you can't make a pledge. Every gift matters and absolutely everyone can participate! If you pledge \$20, you've bought a new bible for one of our 30+ children and youth. The invitation you are being offered is an invitation into a deeper spiritual life, not an invitation to a financial transaction.

Ingathering Sunday is the Sunday before Thanksgiving, November 22nd. And while we won't be gathering for worship, some of our Stewardship Team members, other church leaders and I will be at the church at 11:30 that morning to thank you and to receive and bless you and your pledges. Bring your pledge paper or the beautiful ingathering card included in this packet, but please do come! We want you to be safe, so wear a mask (we'll all be masked too) and stay in your car. Let us see you and thank you and allow me to bless you, as you have blessed me, and blessed us all.

Faithfully,

The Reverend Karen Haig, Rector
St Barnabas Episcopal Church