

Hello, I'm Daniel Ripperton, and I serve on the vestry and the stewardship committee at St. John's Episcopal Church here in Ithaca. Those of you expecting the standard stewardship appeal, made in mellifluous polysyllables, are I'm afraid, going to be disappointed. I recognize and honor the financial needs of Loaves and Fishes, I know we have to maintain our church building, I value and love Mother Megan and our parish staff, and I'd absolutely encourage giving to the church, so those excellent humans get paid and can do things like eat food and so on.

But beloveds, beyond that, we need to talk about what makes the church, the church. These are difficult times. The news -- George Floyd's murder and all the events that have followed in its wake -- has been a lot to deal with. We live in a world, where the life of a black man can be snuffed out by an officer literally sworn (and I'm quoting the oath of office) to "protect...the weak against oppression or intimidation, and the peaceful against violence or disorder." How does one function and how does one live faithfully in such a world? What does Christian stewardship look like in this world?

I think the task of stewardship now could be divided into three parts:

The first part, orientation, involves reminding ourselves that we're not in this alone. We can look to the Holy Spirit -- I'm paraphrasing Ephesians 4:17 -- to root us and ground us in love. Love makes the church the church. And if we ask, I believe the Spirit will show us individually, and in a communal capacity, what God-inspired love looks like.

The second part, evaluation, involves, in self-forgetting care for others, asking where God-inspired love needs to manifest. Jesus was a master of this self-forgetfulness. Think of what He did when He healed people: He often ordered them not to tell anyone. I suspect the point of that admonition was: "This healing is not about Me. It's about you, and how you live now. Who will you choose to be now you've been healed?" If anyone deserves to be centerstage, it's Jesus. But He gave *other people* priority. Other people meant more to Him than Himself. This seems to be a consistent theme throughout the gospels. Look at the post-Resurrection appearances in John 20 and 21. When He is speaking to Mary Magdalene, He says "I am ascending to My Father, and *Your Father*, to my God and *Your God*." *Your God. Your God.* God is for *you*. God loves *you*. The same message is in the appearance to the disciples ("Peace be with *you*") and to Thomas ("Put *your* finger here and see my hands..."). And in final post-Resurrection appearance, Jesus's interactions with the disciples can be summarized as "Mornin' ya goofballs! Breakfast is served!" Jesus is sweet, silly, and I think a bit of a dork. His consistent operating mode is being there for others and checking in with them. "How are you all? Hungry?"

And the third part, action, involves quietly doing your part to live in love toward yourself, God and your community. If a friend needs prayers, and you can offer some, do that. If a protestor needs to be bailed out of jail, and you can Venmo something to @St-Johns-Disambiguation so we can help them get home to their families, do that. If one of your family members is freaking out, and you need to make pancakes and bacon for breakfast, do that. Or as Someone wise once said "Let your light shine before others, so they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in Heaven."

God bless you and thank you for your time.