

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A DEACON?



*Devotions
for Deacons*



- **Faithfully support** those with financial difficulties.
- **Provide hope and encouragement** through words and deeds.
- **Seek out opportunities to serve** the vulnerable, elderly, sick and bereaved.
- **Offer practical assistance** where it is needed (i.e. rides, fixing appliances etc).

JUSTICE

"For I, the Lord, love justice." Isaiah 61: 8a

- **Offer hospitality** to victims of injustices (i.e. refugees, aboriginal people).
- **Encourage participation** in justice-related ministry and advocacy (i.e. letter writing)
- With church members, **discover** practical, just, and sustainable **services** in our communities.
- **Provide ministry and advocacy**

suggestions on behalf of the vulnerable in our communities.

STEWARDSHIP

"from the one who is entrusted with much, much more will be asked."

Luke 12:48b



- **Inspire people to give** generously of their resources.
- **Invite others to participate** in diaconal opportunities to multiply ministry.
- **Provide awareness of opportunities** for service.
- **Educate the congregation** about the financial offerings and denominational ministry of our churches.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE MINISTRY OF THE DEACON?

COMPASSION

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all " Gal. 6:10a

- **Discover the neighbourhood** of your church with its assets and needs.
- **Partner**, where possible, with existing community services.
- **Serve your community** with ministries which build trusting, meaningful relationships.
- Always be able to "give an answer for the hope that you have."

COMMUNITY MINISTRY

"Always be prepared to give an answer...for the hope that you have." 1 Peter 3:15

Community
Ministry

Devotion #1

Leadership



Scripture Reading: Matthew 9:35-10:7, 10:26-31

It could not be clearer. The disciples are called to follow Jesus. Jesus is their leader and teacher. He chose them, He called them, and He will equip them, too.

Rarely is leadership so clearly defined. Think of your church. Leadership is probably as varied and as colourful as the different roles Christ gave to the church. Not everyone is a pastor, elder, deacon or teacher; we cannot all be administrators or coordinators. Praise God that we are gifted differently and that we have opportunity to lead where we are gifted.

With so many leadership roles, however, how should they all work together? In Ephesians 4: 11-12, Paul gives an answer. The goal of leadership in the church, says Paul, is "to equip [God's] people for works of service." "Diakonia" is the Greek word used for "works of service" - the word from which we derive "deacon." Essentially, the leadership of the church works together to provide the resources and equipping for all of the people in the church to be able to serve like deacons in the community.

So what does it look like for deacons and other leaders to equip the church for service? How do you do that? The simple answer is to follow Jesus, just like His disciples.

Model: In Matthew 9:35-36, and elsewhere, Jesus exemplifies what the disciples will be sent out to do. Not only does He meet needs and bring the good news of the Kingdom, Jesus also looks with compassion on the crowds around Him. What a beautiful model of diakonia.

In the church and community, serving looks differently for each person. Peter urges Christ-followers to "use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." (1 Peter 4:10). Those gifts might be hospitality, encouragement, compassion, prayer or others. Deacons, as you discern gifts within the diaconate, and assume different roles to match those gifts, you will be "faithful stewards of God's grace" for your congregation. Serve your community with the compassion of Christ, and others will follow.

Mentor: Jesus taught His followers, giving them tools to continue His work. And they learned from Him. The apostle Paul also spent quite a bit of time with Timothy, teaching him to take on leadership in ministry. He then told Timothy, in turn, to "entrust" his words to "reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others." Equip new deacons, then, by mentoring and walking with them as they begin their ministry.

Encourage: Jesus did not just model ministry and mentor leadership, He also equipped His disciples through encouragement. He told them not to be afraid; He reminded them of their value. So, how do you, as deacons, encourage people in the church to use their gifts to serve others?

In the "Charge to the Deacon," there are a number of important verbs: inspire, remind, teach, prompt, minister, be compassionate, respect, and encourage. All of these are only accomplished through prayer, and the equipping of the Holy Spirit, in humility and with

dependence. The Holy Spirit gives encouragement (Acts 9:31), so that you may encourage others. May your goal be like Paul's, that the church "be encouraged in heart and united in love." (Col. 2:2a)

Deacons, you have an important leadership role in the church! As you are examples and mentors of service, and encourage your congregation to serve, you will bless your community and be blessed in return. Commit this to God and resolve to lead as God has called you.



Community Ministry

Devotion #2

Partnership



Scripture Reading: Philippians 1:1-11

In Acts 16, Paul is on a journey visiting churches he has established and firing people up for the gospel. He has probably mapped out a route already and set his course –until the Spirit of the Lord tells him differently, that is. Paul wants to go to Asia. The Spirit says no. Paul wants to go to Bithynia. The Spirit says no again.

And then Paul receives a vision, sending him to the outer reaches of where the Jews had scattered: a Roman colony with no temple, no place of worship or gathering. Yet Paul obeys.

Without a temple in which to preach, Paul goes down to the river to speak to the Gentile women there. This isn't necessarily a promising start, by the standards of the day. But, because he listens to the Spirit, Paul's conversation with the women by the river eventually leads to a church plant - the Philippian church, a church that becomes Paul's "partner in the gospel" (Phil. 1:5). Partnerships are important for ministry. At its heart, ministry is relational. Paul understood this and depended on the blessings of partnership to help

and encourage him.

Partnerships are Spirit-given: Before arriving in Philippi and establishing the church, Paul is redirected by the Spirit away from other places of ministry. He is given a vision that will lead him to Philippi. The Spirit guides Paul into this important partnership.

Partnerships begin with commonality: Partnerships work well when there is a fundamental understanding of what is shared. For Paul and the church in Philippi, they "share in God's grace" (vs. 7). It is a basic place to start. Sin is a great equalizer; everyone is equally in need of grace and each person is equally made in God's image.

Partnerships focus on strengths: In strong partnerships, each partner has something important to contribute. Paul knows that the church in Philippi supports him through prayer (vs. 19), and will also "stand firm" (vs. 27) for the gospel. Paul realizes that his encouragement and teaching are also important to the

church (vs. 24). Together, as partners, Paul and the church encourage and pray for each other and work from their strengths to advance the gospel together.

Partnerships give joy: Encouragement is critical to ministry and to partnership. Paul is writing the letter to the Philippians from prison, and, as he prays for the church in Philippi and is being prayed for, God gives him joy. Joy transcends experience and energizes mission.

Deacons, you need partners, like Paul, who will serve with you in your church and community. By the grace of God, however, you will form many partnerships as you live out God's call on your life. Your partners may be members of your church who are equipped and called to serve with you. Your partners may also be your neighbours whom you serve and through whom you receive blessing. There are others: Diaconal Ministries Canada and other ministries, community agencies, and churches.

Seek out the Spirit's leading as you seek out partnerships.

Pray! Allow God's Spirit to humble you and work through you. Open your heart as you partner and serve alongside those to whom the Spirit will lead you. Look for, and be blessed by each others' strengths. Never lose sight of the fact that we are all in need of grace: from the deacon sitting next to you to the members of your congregation, to your neighbour in need who might just bless you in surprising ways.

And, last of all, expect joy.

Much More Than Needs



Scripture Reading: Mark 12:41-44

Jesus is a gifted teacher. He knows His audience and understands their context. When He tells a parable, He relates it to their ordinary lives. He talks of farming and baking. With Jesus, the engravings on a coin become an object lesson. And seemingly insignificant children demonstrate something of the Kingdom.

So when Jesus enters the temple in Jerusalem, the disciples can anticipate that He will have something to say about what He sees and encounters.

Just beyond and through the gate, Jesus comes to the place for offerings. Here He sits down opposite the offering boxes. Together Jesus and His disciples watch as people give. The wealthy file by, making a show of "throwing" in their "large amounts." And then comes the widow, with her two copper coins.

Just prior to this, Jesus had taught the crowds in the temple courts, denouncing the religious leaders for exploiting widows. The crowds had listened "with delight," but now there is more that Jesus wants

to teach. He has more to say about the widow. To Jesus, she is not simply a victim of exploitation.

We can quickly see where Jesus is going with this: the widow's "mites" are proportionately more of a sacrifice for her than the large amounts easily given by the wealthy. But notice what Jesus does here. He doesn't simply focus on the relative value of the copper coins. Jesus implies that the woman's gift -everything she has -is evidence of her faith in God to provide. By giving everything, the widow is also expressing her dependence on God. Part of what Jesus is doing here is subtly shifting the object lesson from wealth to true value.

The widow is a victim of societal injustice. She might have only a little to give. But to Jesus, she is immensely valuable because of who she is and because of her faith in God.

Jesus has a way of doing this when He encounters people. Whether healing or teaching, He sees past the immediate need. Not that it isn't

important. But beyond the need, He sees a hurting person. An individual whom he cherishes and loves. Each person has immense value to Jesus. An untouchable leper is touched. A sick, marginalized woman is called "daughter." A crippled man is raised up, forgiven and healed. And what about when Jesus shares the intimacy of a meal with a despised tax collector? These are just some of the beautiful expressions of how relational and loving Jesus is.

And what a beautiful pattern this is for deacons. Each person we encounter, each person we hope to help is a person created in God's image and of infinite value. That person is not defined by his or her needs -even if that is all we can see initially. It will take some time and effort to see the things that Jesus saw effortlessly and immediately.

Deacons, learn to look for what your neighbours have to contribute. Learn to see them as Jesus sees them. By getting to know your neighbours, by learning about them and what they can contribute, you will empower them and affirm their dignity.

But continue to meet needs. That is still important. And, while doing that, consider the context -for there is much to learn there. Trust God to give you the courage to look deeper. To listen to a story. To turn away from judgement. To try and understand why a situation exists.

Love each person and, with God's help, allow them to become more to you than their circumstance or their need.

Pray continually.

Pray for God to bless you as you build relationships and pray that the Spirit will enable you to love your neighbour as Jesus loved.

Growing Together

Compassion



Scripture Reading: Matthew 20:29-34

It is almost Passover, and faithful Jews are on their way to Jerusalem. And so is Jesus, walking the road from Jericho, soon to fulfill the Passover feast in a way the Jews around Him cannot conceive of. The crowd grows larger as Jesus leaves the city. You can probably imagine the talking, laughing, and singing as they anticipate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Their king! They are on their way, blind to the significance of this journey. And yet, ironically, the crowd tells the blind men begging by the road that Jesus does not have time for them. How little they understand about Jesus, about who He is and what He has come to do.

Over the din of the crowd, the blind men shout for Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" He asks. They want His mercy; they want healing. And so, Jesus has compassion on them and heals them.

In this story, and certainly others, Jesus is moved to action by the sickness, suffering or hunger around Him. He is not simply meeting needs so He can get on with teaching and other priorities; His heart is filled with

compassion as He shows grace and mercy by healing, but also by affirming value, restoring dignity, and demonstrating worth. How amazing the mercy and compassion of a loving God. "His mercies never end. They are new every morning" (Lam. 3:23). Each day, the heart of God overflows for His people. For your church and for your community. For you.

Mercy and compassion often go hand in hand. In Scripture, they most often reference God's character and challenge us to develop ours. Mercy and compassion are also pretty fundamental to the role of the deacon. The form for the ordination of deacons starts with mercy. But what about compassion? Are mercy and compassion interchangeable? Well, if you look carefully, you can see that they are certainly related. Compassion seems to be primarily about the heart; it means to "suffer with." Jesus shows mercy when He is moved with compassion. Compassion, it seems, compels those acts of mercy that are central to the role of the deacon.

Giving to those in need is one act of mercy. Deacons, you know the responsibility of using gifts wisely and with discernment. You care about what you are doing and you put deliberate thought into it. But the challenge is to engage your heart. Even at arm's length, it is not impossible, but certainly more difficult to create a compassionate connection to those in need who receive what we offer and have much to give in return.

So, back to Jesus. When He is moved with compassion, He is often moved by what or whom He sees in front of Him. The person. The heart. The suffering. He knows a woman's brokenness, He knows her pain. But Jesus also looks past the immediate need to the dignity and worth of the person in front of Him. And He loves her. He loves him. He loves people like the rich young ruler, a prostitute, and the Samaritan woman.

To be moved with compassion means a certain vulnerability. It means allowing God to break your heart for the people around you. But, before all of that, it

means cultivating a heart like the heart of God.

But how can we even begin to have a heart like God? An important place to begin is to begin with prayer. Ask for His Holy Spirit. Open His Word and learn from Him. Devotion and prayer time is very important for your diaconate. Grow together. Be intentional. Set a goal of spiritual growth as deacons. Make it as important a time together as your time discussing the "business" of your agenda.

And God will bless that. And He will soften and break and mend and mold your hearts. Little by little.

And then get out there. Immerse yourself in your community and the people around you. Listen to them. Learn who they are and what they have to offer. Learn about the injustices they suffer, the needs that they have. Feel with compassion their brokenness and pain.

And then, from that place, let the love of Jesus, cultivated and growing within your diaconate, overflow your heart into acts of mercy and love.

Bringing Hope

Compassion



Scripture Reading: Mark 2:1-12

Jesus knows the crowds around Him. He has been to Capernaum before. The last time He was here, the crowds had listened and watched Him with amazement, quick to recognize that Jesus was different from other teachers and religious leaders. The people had not been able to contain their amazement at His teaching, His authority, and His power. The news about Him had spread around the entire region.

It is no wonder then, that on His return to Capernaum, Jesus has drawn a large crowd. So large, in fact, that there seems to be no way to get close to Him. For many, it is enough just to hear Him speak. For four determined friends, however, it is not enough. The story is familiar: the friends carry the paralyzed man up to the roof, cut a hole in it, and lower the man to Jesus.

There is urgent need here and clear determination. Like the crowds below them, the friends have likely seen and heard how amazing Jesus is. They also have hope. They hope in the healing that Jesus can provide. But notice that Jesus sees the *faith* of the four friends. Faith goes a step further –it is being sure of what we hope for (Hebrews 11:1a). And what does Jesus do in response to their faith? He forgives and then heals.

Jesus has a different idea of hope. He is the source of all hope, and He knows truest need. Before healing the man who cannot walk, Jesus forgives his sins. Of course He is mindful of the crowds, mindful of the teachers of the law gathered around Him and judging Him. He is teaching them something, too - revealing who He is by showing that both forgiveness and healing are possible with

God. So if the lesson for the leaders seems to be about authority, perhaps the lesson for the four friends is more about hope.

Hope is precious. It is a powerful motivator. It compels us to envision something better. In an imperfect and often painful world, the beautiful promise of Heaven's perfection is the source of our hope. What a privilege it is to share the vision of what is to come. Yet meeting needs and sharing hope are often connected. The hopeful vision of justice for the poor and marginalized, the possibility of a better life or of new possibilities is grounded in a more hopeful vision of a world renewed and redeemed by God, transformed and perfect. This is the true source of hope.

Deacons, you are agents of hope. As you meet needs and

bless your community with the compassion of Christ, you will be bringing hope. And hope does not disappoint because the hope you bring is rooted and grounded in your faith in a God who loves justice and has a heart for the poor and marginalized. Our God will bring reconciliation and justice. This is the God in whom you put your faith. This is the God who will give you what you need to inspire hope.

Simply by your love and your actions, your neighbours will begin to envision a different future. As you build and establish relationships, and as trust and love develops, keep your mind and heart open to the prompting of the Spirit to share the source of all hope.

Praise God that He is already at work in your community and invites you to join Him in bringing hope!



Compassion



Scripture Reading: Luke 10:25-37

For the expert in the law, it is all about clearly defined rules. And he knows them, too. He knows them so well he thinks he can challenge Jesus. How sad that he completely misses the point. How sad that what fills his head fails to penetrate his heart. Jesus came to fulfill the law, to free him from the rules, and to give him eternal life. If he knew that, it would completely change everything. He would not stand there debating, either. He would be out doing.

Jesus' story about the Samaritan and the beaten man is a perfect example of how Jesus changes the rules. Does the expert see himself in the story? Can he recognize that he is also a "road crosser," like the priest and the Levite? Perhaps he should also see himself in the wounded man – someone with a different kind of wound. A man also in need of compassion.

There is only one way to respond to Jesus' final question. The expert is forced to answer in a way that must have made him squirm: the Samaritan – an outsider, an enemy – is the neighbor to the wounded man. Jesus has expertly tested the expert. There is nothing left to say.

Compassion, like that of the Samaritan's, cannot be about rules. Compassion must engage the heart. As love for our Heavenly Father deepens and broadens, compassion for our neighbour will flow out of that love. As we more and more understand what it is to receive grace, we will be grace-filled and will love our neighbour out of thankfulness.

Who is our neighbour? We answer with the expert that our neighbour is the one in need. But perhaps we should first see the need in ourselves. We are not so different from

our neighbour; the "wounds" may just look different, like the Samaritan. He may not have had external wounds but he was despised and marginalized in Jewish society. Let compassion come from those places of pain and weakness that we share.

And notice the kind of compassion Jesus offers is practical. The Samaritan happened to be on the same road as the man. He was thorough and generous in his help, but he helped within his means. The Samaritan took care of the man's wounds, but it meant paying the innkeeper to look after him beyond that initial care.

Similarly, we may look for opportunities to be compassionate where we are. There may be different places to serve, and some may ask us to go outside of our comfort zone. We must be thorough – not only looking to

immediate needs, but thinking deeper about the injustices that contribute to the context. We must also think about longer-term solutions for the people to whom we show compassion. And there may be an "innkeeper" whose partnership will help when it is beyond our capacity to respond further.

Jesus is practical. He turns a test around, and into an opportunity for instruction. The parable silences His accuser, but it can also teach so much about the compassion that Jesus Himself exhibited in His life and ministry. Praise God that in a small way each one of us, in our own context, may proclaim freedom from the rules, and allow our hearts to be engaged for the hurting, the mistreated and the marginalized.

How would your diaconate stand up to Jesus' test?

Do Justice



Justice



Scripture Reading: Luke 4:1-21

Jesus will soon begin His ministry on earth. So the timing is right, and the devil is determined to try. Satan takes this opportunity to try and twist Jesus' coming ministry to fit his own purposes. Perhaps he might be able to tempt Jesus to misuse His power. Jesus has been fasting for 40 days. He is hungry, physically weak, and as vulnerable as the Son of God can be. But, despite all of that, we know that there is no way the devil can change the beautiful purpose that God has ordained for Jesus' time on earth.

Although Jesus' return to Nazareth might have been some time after His temptation in the wilderness, Luke chooses to place those stories side-by-side in his gospel. What a contrast between the "ministry" Satan tries to tempt Jesus into and the very opposite that Jesus reveals as His calling!

Jesus stands in the temple and reads from the scroll of Isaiah. To the people, He is reading a prophecy. To Jesus, He is proclaiming His mission. It is a glorious declaration of who He is and what He has come to do. Jesus is strong in the Spirit, anointed with purpose, chosen for ministry, and burning for justice.

Every word Jesus speaks points to so much more than the "gracious words" the people hear Him speak. He is praised for His teaching, known for His miracles yet there does not seem to be one person in the temple who sees the heart of God opened before them like Isaiah's scroll.

Jesus has come for rich and poor, for the captive, the ill, and the oppressed. Jesus is on the margins, even in his home town, and He will bring His purposes to the margins as well.

It is impossible to try and disconnect the miracles and teaching of Jesus from His heart for justice. At every turn, at every miracle, His words and actions are shaped by a desire to make things right, to reconcile, to restore.

He speaks Beatitudes that undercut Jewish legalism. He confronts the powerful. He heals both a Jewish leper and a Canaanite's daughter. He restores dignity to the outcast demon-possessed man and pauses for a life-changing conversation with a Samaritan woman.

He is revered as a Rabbi, but is rejected in his home town. He pays His taxes from the mouth of a fish, but from His mouth comes a warning about economic injustice where the poor are uncared for. He redefines and expands what it means to be family, and recreates community from the margins out.

He tells parables that turn upside down society and the way it works. Jesus' teachings and miracles become living proof of a better way.

Let Jesus' better way be an inspiration for the ministry of deacons. Let it free you to be the deacons you are called and chosen to be –serving within your gifts and following your passions and compassion.

Seek to restore and to reconcile. Take each act of charity, relief and mercy and look deeper to see if there is a way to make things right. Do not be content, wherever possible, to give help without your time, your listening ear, and your love.

So, do ministry. Do justice. Love always. And pray for the anointing of the Holy Spirit to flood your hearts until you are overflowing with love and a passion for His justice in your community and in this world.

Hospitality is more than a Committee



Justice



Scripture Reading: Luke 7:36-50

This is not exactly a straightforward dinner invitation. It comes from Simon, a Pharisee, and it comes after a progression of encounters between the law-keeping Pharisees and Jesus, who is clearly not what the Pharisees expect of a teacher.

The Pharisees are, at first, clearly puzzled and mildly alarmed at the things Jesus does. They accuse Him of blasphemy when He heals and forgives the paralytic. They grumble that Jesus eats with a tax collector. They see Him as unlawful when He and His disciples pick grain and eat it on the Sabbath. However, when Jesus heals on the Sabbath, publically and in front of everyone, the Pharisees are “furious” and begin “to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.” (Luke 6:11). The next encounter comes after Simon’s invitation to dinner.

In the context of all that has already happened, it seems clear that eating at Simon’s house will not be a simple social call. By inviting Jesus to a formal dinner, the Pharisee is inviting Jesus into a context in which a certain decorum is expected and religious debate is encouraged. It probably seems like a perfect place to trap Jesus. And Simon’s lack of proper welcome might just betray his true motives. But Jesus knows Simon’s heart and is ready to use this opportunity to show him a better way.

When the woman from the town enters the dinner, something rare and amazing happens. This woman, whom the Bible says lived a “sinful life,” in essence displaces Simon as host of the dinner. And her welcome is beautiful! She lavishly pours out her love at Jesus’ feet, and Jesus graciously receives it and recognizes the value of her hospitality. Simon does not give

Jesus water for washing; yet this woman wets Jesus’ feet with her tears. Simon does not welcome Jesus with a kiss; yet the woman even kisses his feet. Jesus restores her dignity by giving her a “place” of honour, receiving her gift, and forgiving her sins.

And yet, Jesus is also host. He cares for the woman and pours out that forgiveness generously. With Jesus, the roles are not clearly defined. They shift around, making both the act of giving and receiving equally important within the context of hospitality. Pharisees know all about law and truth. Jesus adds grace to the truth to widen the welcome and create a climate of hospitality that pushes boundaries and overturns expectations.

Deacons, if hospitality sounds to you like the work of a committee, perhaps it is time to reclaim the practice within

your diaconal work. It means being intentional about welcoming the stranger, but it also means affirming each person’s dignity and worth.

And yet, if this puts the deacon perpetually in the position of host, a critical dimension is lost. Jesus gave to the Pharisee and to the woman the gift of His wisdom, His grace and His forgiveness. However, Jesus was also guest: He received from the woman and from the Pharisee alike. This recognition fundamentally challenges the imbalance of power between a person with needs and a person (or diaconate) with resources.

Understanding that everyone has something to give and that everyone is blessed by receiving creates a welcome and hospitality that builds community, affirms dignity and maintains generous spaces of inclusion. Be blessed as you do justice through hospitality.

A Mustard Seed Kind of Kingdom



Justice



Scripture Reading: Matthew 13:10-17, 31-32

Jesus is talking to the crowds, but His words are really meant for the disciples. He is telling stories which may have meant something to the people, with common enough references and familiar contexts. But the secrets of the kingdom, the truth within those stories, are given to those whose eyes could see and whose ears could hear.

Each picture, each story must have given the disciples yet another glimpse of the Kingdom; but they must have been confusing too. The Kingdom that Jesus was bringing was probably not what they were expecting. Little did the disciples understand that Jesus' Kingdom, begun through ministry and established through the cross, would change their world. Even more, it would turn their world upside down. And, amazingly, in that chaos of change, would be reconciliation and peace.

The parable of the mustard seed is as small as the seed itself; like the seed, this little parable is full of potential for growth. And like the mustard seed, growth happens for a purpose.

The mustard tree may not be the biggest, but it is a plant with a purpose. The listeners' first thought might have been about how the tree is good (with its oil, spice and healing properties), but Jesus focuses on the birds. The birds perch in the shade of the tree. They are drawn to it. The tree is a place of blessing and safety for the birds. Like the tree, God's Kingdom is about community and peace.

And like the mustard seed, the Kingdom is created from the small and insignificant. It is almost counter-intuitive to expect a large tree from a tiny seed. But the tree from the mustard seed was more like a weed, forbidden in the gardens of Palestine because it could

easily overtake an entire garden.

A mustard plant makes sense, though. Why would Jesus compare His Kingdom to a something like mighty oak when Jesus Himself is its foot-washing, donkey-riding leader, who told secrets to fishermen and hung out with prostitutes and tax collectors?

Yet through His death and triumphant resurrection, Jesus ushers peace into this Kingdom of chaos, and creates a new culture of a kingdom that just doesn't fit with expectations or the culture of that day.

If, as Jesus says, the tiny mustard seed is like the Kingdom, it needs a sower, someone who believes in the potential of the small, insignificant and ordinary. Together, sower and seed and the Holy Spirit work to grow a Kingdom that is communal, counter-cultural

and created through the insignificant.

Deacons, in your corner of the Kingdom, you are called to be the sower. A mustard seed reveals its potency when crushed; joining God in building this Kingdom will not be easy. But it can bring the peace and shalom of community, and it can create a powerful vision of something different that the world has rarely seen—something the world desperately needs.

It starts with the insignificant: a phone call, a "hand up," a partnership. So deacons, sow your seed. And bring the peace of Christ in your corner of the Kingdom.

Leading Like the Good Shepherd

Stewardship



Scripture Reading: John 10:1-8

The Pharisees are divided. In the preceding chapter, a man born blind receives his sight and the Pharisees just don't know what to make of it.

Some are "blind" themselves – ignoring the miracle and focusing on the fact that it unlawfully took place on the Sabbath. Others doubt the man's claim that he was blind from birth. Still others do not find Jesus as credible as Moses or other historical leaders they revere.

The one thing the Pharisees do agree on is that the once-blind man should be thrown out of the synagogue for his stubborn faith in Jesus. So Jesus goes to find the man and, in doing so, confronts the Pharisees. It is right after this encounter that John records how Jesus uses the metaphor of shepherd and sheep.

The contrast is obvious between Jesus, the Good

Shepherd, and the Pharisees, who are like thieves and robbers. Jesus leads His sheep by the "still waters" and "green pastures" while the Pharisees do not even enter the pen by the gate and abandon the sheep at the first sign of danger.

The metaphor goes even further, however. The Good Shepherd does not just lead the sheep, He has been entrusted with them. This parable is critical of the leadership of the Pharisees, but there is also an interesting and subtle connection to stewardship. The shepherd has a relationship with the sheep. There is a dynamic of care, not ownership. Their care and management are his primary concern.

Under the shepherd, the sheep experience a sheep-like shalom –the safety of being under the care of the shepherd where the dangers in the world around them are carefully navigated.

The shepherd must confront all that would threaten the sheep - like "thieves and robbers" such as the Pharisees who were not stewardly with the spiritual gifts and legacy of leadership they had received.

Much like the shepherd, we, as stewards, care for what we have been entrusted with, confront all that threatens to waste or destroy, and manage responsibly what God has created. And we have been entrusted with much – relationships, time, wealth, God's Creation, gifts of both ability and spiritual blessings.

Unlike the Good Shepherd, however, we are guilty of waste, the unjust use of resources, a lack of care. We do not lead as we should. Sometimes we are more like the thieves and robbers. But, praise God, there is grace for the undershepherd.

Deacons, you are shepherds of

the people of God, along with pastors and elders –leaders who will model the care that the shepherd extends to the sheep. Together, we are all called to expose the dangers of excess and waste. We must show what the restoration of a just relationship with all creation might look like –how to live as caretakers, how to bring glimpses of shalom.

Deacons, you are called to model stewardship in your relationship with the good things God has entrusted to us. Of course this includes how you use the offerings, but it extends beyond that to your time, your gifts and your life-style.

But don't be discouraged! Never neglect to look to the Good Shepherd. Jesus walks with you, extends His grace, and guides you as the perfect pattern of leadership and stewardly living.

Stewardship of Gifts

Stewardship



Scripture Reading: Luke 6:12-16

It is such a simple story. And yet it has profound significance for the early church and its ministry.

This story also begins simply - with prayer. Jesus has spent a busy day - busy with things of ministry. He has been healing and teaching and giving of Himself where He is needed. As night comes, He knows He needs to receive from His Heavenly Father and experience renewal before a new day begins. So Jesus goes to a mountainside to spend the night with His Father in communion and close communication.

As morning comes, Jesus calls His disciples to Him. These disciples are His followers, students of Jesus, and blessed to be learning from Him. Jesus chooses twelve of them, and commissions them for the task of apostle. These men will not only continue to learn from Jesus, they will be sent out,

ambassadors of His Kingdom.

To most people, it would make sense that this list of 12 reads like a “who’s who” of religious leaders. Wouldn’t Jesus include a rabbi, someone with the gift of prophesy, perhaps, an official, someone who studies Scripture? Or maybe a practiced speaker, someone who could persuade people with well-chosen words? It makes sense that the qualifications for apostle should be significant.

But, no. Jesus chooses fishermen, men so close to their daily labour that they abruptly leave their nets by the lake to follow Jesus. Jesus chooses a tax collector, quick to leave dishonest gain behind. A doubter. A zealot. A betrayer. These are the men chosen by Jesus.

Perhaps their vocations give them certain valuable skills. Certainly Jesus can use

anything, no matter how meagre, for His purposes. But, somehow, those kinds of qualifications do not seem immediately apparent or important.

He wants them as they are, calloused hands, cheating schemes, doubting hearts and all. Of course Jesus knows what’s really in their hearts. And in the end He wants willing hearts and ready hands because He is the one who will equip each one.

Unlike Jesus, we do not have the discernment on our own to figure out how and where each member of the congregation will serve. But listen to Peter. He writes that “each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” (1 Peter 4:10)

What an amazing thought that our gifts are manifestations of

God’s grace! Grace gives us a reason to serve, but also, by God’s grace, each one of us has been given spiritual gifts.

Notice that grace enables, but it is stewardship that compels. Stewardship is about using our gifts wisely and willingly, and then letting the Holy Spirit align it with God’s purpose.

Deacons, this is where your leadership is important. First seek discernment so that you understand God’s purpose for your congregation. Start with prayer, just as Jesus did.

Ask Him where and how your church should serve. Ask Him to equip you to lead and encourage your congregation to find stewardly ways to use gifts to serve. Let Him reveal those whom He has equipped. And then invite them to join you in ministry.

Stewardship of Time



Stewardship

Scripture Reading: Mark 6:7-13, 30-44

Of all His disciples and followers, Jesus chooses twelve to become apostles. In Mark 3:14-15, Jesus sets them apart “that they might be sent out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.”

And even though they have not been following Jesus very long, and even though they do not have special training or particular skills, the apostles are sent out. Jesus gives them instructions, and sends them out trusting God’s provision and relying on the hospitality of others.

Once they return, the apostles are eager to tell Jesus about all that has happened and what they have accomplished. Can you imagine how exciting that must have been? They didn’t start out with the necessary skills and expertise. They probably had no idea how it was going to go. But Jesus sends them. He equips them. He gives them authority and

power, and they did things that they probably never dreamed possible. So of course they are eager and excited.

Yet, after that initial excitement, of arrivals, busyness and story-telling, Jesus quiets them. Not because their stories aren’t important. He has listened and loved them. But, in that moment, Jesus discerns that they need rest and food. So they go off in the boat, by themselves, for rest.

When they reach the other shore, however, the quiet meal they had envisioned is clearly not going to happen. And Jesus’ compassion is the reason the intimate meal for 13 people will become a communal banquet for thousands. In this moment, Jesus discerns the greater need and who needs His time most.

Time is a precious gift. It is the one thing we often feel short of. And often, in ministry, we use

our time to the fullest. There are meetings to attend, visits to make, money to disburse, and ministries to coordinate. We are busy people, coming and going, sent and equipped by Jesus, too.

Yet Jesus knows that, for us to be effective stewards of the gift of time, we need to manage this precious gift with care and discernment. We need to be intentional. We need to ensure that we have balance between family and ministry, work and rest.

We also need to manage priorities. We need to set priorities for our time to ensure that, in all the busyness and bustle, we are still being effective in ministry. As a diaconate, how do we spend our time? Are our meetings productive? And, when we leave those meetings, what sorts of ministry tasks do we carry into the week? Do they reflect the priorities of our

diaconate? Do they match our gifts? Do they match our work plan?

Jesus had perfect discernment. He knew when to be alone in prayer, He knew when to preach to the crowds, He knew when His disciples needed to rest or to listen or to be sent out. Yet, Jesus had one simple exception. Compassion stirred His heart and, while He ensured balance and care in the way He used His time, Jesus also left His heart wide open to be moved in love.

Discernment and stewardship of time come through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to guide your diaconate to discern how to be stewards of time. Ask Him how to find balance and be effective even while opening your heart to be moved to compassion when He calls you to reach out in love.