

Pentecost 23A

November 16, 2014

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Judges 4:1-7

Psalm 123

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Matthew 25:14-30

The master in our Gospel lesson went away, and expected his servants to make good use of what resources he had left with them. In fact this story from Jesus says that they should have been risk takers; you and I should be risk takers, in order to make the most use out of all the skills, time, money, and other resources that God has assigned to us. The concept of stewardship is to be intentional about creatively using the resources God has given us.

Edy, Wanda, Eric, Mandy and I spent Friday afternoon through Saturday afternoon at our annual Diocesan Convention. At that Convention, Bishop Mary presented the theme she has chosen for all of us in this diocese to reflect on and incorporate into our activities this year. The theme for our diocese in this next year is to BE the church.

St. George's in Salinas began what they call Eucharist in the Park. The city has a soccer complex, and it is a very busy place on the weekends. The mayor of Salinas made a comment to Fr. Robles that 'somehow' the church should be there. Fr. Robles came on Palm Sunday and set up a pop-up, a table, and conducted a blessing and distribution of palms, and held a Mass. They passed out flyers about their Easter Sunday service. This has become an event on the first Sunday of each month at 12 noon. I wonder if we could be the church in some similar way. One of the slides that was projected during the Convention said: "The church has left the building".

We have twenty children in our preschool, who attend chapel twice a week. We go over the colors and meanings of the liturgical seasons, the purpose and use of all sorts of church hardware (Last week I talked about how we pray using kneelers on the chairs, or kneeler cushions, or bowing our heads, or raising our hands). We always have a great Bible story, and the lesson it teaches us about being the people of God. Then we say the Lord's Prayer, we give a blessing for any child having a birthday, and we go around the circle for the children to offer a prayer request on a topic I suggest. (The prayers usually start in August with their love for Power Rangers. Last week some of the children were praying for a friend who was sick.) There are 20

children for 20 minutes, twice every week. Does that count as taking the church into the neighborhood? I vote YES. The children often go home to tell their parents what was taught in chapel. Two parents have asked for recommendations for a children's Bible they could buy for their child. I have given each of them a wonderful children's Bible. I want you to know how powerfully we are "the church" through our preschool. I wonder in what ways this faith community can grow in the ways we serve these families who entrust their children to our care?

Our guest speaker at Convention was the Rev Eric Law, an Episcopal priest, an author, and the executive director of an organization named Kaleidoscope Institute. Fr. Law's stated charter is: To transform the way community and church leaders think about church—from a static, linear and maintenance-type mode to a dynamic, circulatory, and rejuvenating vision of a church that interacts with the wider community by maximizing the flow of spiritual, human and economic resources. There are fifteen churches in our diocese who are now engaged with Fr. Law, and they are loving what they are learning about new ways to "be the church". I wonder if we should be part of that learning.

Our pledge drive for this year is quickly drawing to a close. Our in-gathering day is next Sunday. Then we will decide whether to keep our poster out, displaying our theme: Walking the Way. I think we should keep it out. In our Gospel lessons for these past few weeks Jesus has been giving examples of what it is like when the Kingdom of God arrives. But today he is telling us that it is extremely important to God what we are doing while we wait for him to return. Burying our talents in the ground until Christ's return is not the right answer, and of course we don't do that. There is plenty we are doing with the gifts God continues to so richly bless us with here at St Stephen's. The challenge before us is to continually be on the lookout, and to act on ways to invest our gifts into our community and into the world, so that we maximize what is accomplished for God's Kingdom.

Our theme for this fall's pledge campaign, the theme from our bishop for the next year, and the theme from our Gospel lesson today all say the same thing: WALK the way; LIVE the Gospel; BE the church. This is the deepest meaning of effective stewardship.

Amen.