

Rev. Scott C. Schantzenbach

ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP ~ STEWARDSHIP SPECIALIST

NEW JERSEY SYNOD, EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA



Stewardship Sermon Starters
5th Sunday of Easter
May 14, 2006
John 15:1-8

The AA group met at the church building only once each week. But, the phone calls searching for a meeting came almost daily. They were from persons who knew how important it was to stay connected with the group that would encourage sobriety and offer the hope of a fresh start and a new life.

In the 15th chapter of John, Jesus has a similar message for all who would follow his way. He said, "Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me...apart from me you can do nothing".

The exercise of our stewardship responsibilities is a reflection of our connectedness to God. In ancient times, that first fruits grain offering that agrarian people offered to God was a powerful sign of their connection. A farmer or shepherd, who offers the first of the harvest, has just given away their seed for next year. They trusted that locusts would not destroy the remaining crops during the night...they trusted that a wolf would not kill the ewe that evening. Their offering was significant in that it placed the donor in a position of reliance and connectedness with the God who would provide for their present and future needs. Their stewardship told of the substance of their faith.

In the 21st century, our pledge card reflects our solidarity with the God of creation. When we make our stewardship commitments, we do not know if we will still be employed in June, if the hurricane will destroy our home in September, or if we will be disabled in November. Our pledge reflects our reliance connectedness to a God of abundance.

Our Youth Ministry Specialist recently shared a story of a conversation with a youth ministry volunteer in one of our inner city congregations. The volunteer pointed to

some faces in an old youth group photo and told the story of their lives. “These two persons are dead...these three are in prison...we lost touch with her. We just tell our people, ‘You either stay connected to Jesus, or you will lose your life’.”

Good stewards understand connectedness. Jesus said, “Just as a branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.” In the 21st century that means that you and Jesus have the same DNA. Love, generosity, compassion, and a faithful heart are all part of our discipleship. You either stay connected, or you lose your life!