

*June 5, 2011*

# ***“We Are Stewards of an Inheritance”***

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# We Are Stewards of an Inheritance

Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53  
Easter Ascension Year A

Sermon by Sharon Rhodes-Wickett  
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When Al and I were married in 1977 he had one grandmother still living. I never got to meet his other grandparents, but I learned much about them through Al; his memories and the values he attributed to them.

His grandparents had the good fortune to buy avocado and citrus orchards in Orange County that also happened to have oil! His grandparents were wise stewards of their wealth. They invested in what endures, such as schools and church. And rather than just leave a whole bunch of money for their children and grandchildren, they set up trust funds. They were set up so that when each grandchild turned pre-determined ages, they would get a rather nice distribution. They set the ages to be a bit later in life, hoping – I'm sure – that by then some wisdom would have set in!

The distributions began to come to us at the same time that Al and I made the decision that it was more important to us to serve one church together rather than be in two separate churches. That meant going from two full-time salaries to one, as we shared one position. YES, we were incredibly idealistic and naïve – and it was the right move for us to make.

There was little doubt that we could survive on the one salary we received, but we didn't care. This was before and during our child-bearing years and being in the same church meant everything to us. Our children would be in the same church as both of us. We would both equally raise our children, as well as pastor the church. So we co-pastored one church, sharing one salary. Did we work half time? HA! But we did experience some freedom in scheduling.

Because we really couldn't afford to do what we were doing, we tended to extend ourselves through the miracle of credit cards. We ended up paying high interest rates for the privilege.

And then Al turned 30, then 35 and 40, and lovely distributions of money came in... which we would use to bring our credit card balance back down. I suspect Al's grandparents would not have understood our choices. They would have shaken their heads wondering if they should have set the ages for distribution even later.

But what their planning enabled us to do was to start our family in one church, where it was easier to work out maternity and paternity leave; where the church loved and supported us as a family; where we could give our children the time, love, and attention we wanted to give. Were it not for the careful planning of Al's grandparents, we would have sunk in debt by our decision to make our family a strong priority in our lives of ministry. They left us an inheritance that enabled us to live out our values. What a gift it was. And the gift is even more precious now in Al's absence; that we were able to share equally co-pastoring and raising our children when they were so tender and young.

We also had great fun deciding where the 10% tithe from the gift would go each time. We chose special ministries such as Sierra Service Project, Claremont School of Theology, and special projects at our local church.

The givers of the inheritance had no say in how we, the recipients, would use the gift. They gave in love, trusting that the gift would make a difference. We received and used the gift in love, trusting that our decisions would make a difference.

Not only were we stewards of Al's grandparent's inheritance, but we were also stewards of our ministry God gave us to do – and we were stewards of our family – an incredible gift that we did not want to squander. Thanks to Al's grandparents, all these gifts were able to work together for the good of God's hope in us. What a gift indeed.

Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus: "...with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of God's glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of God's power for us who believe, according to the working of God's great power."

All of us have received an inheritance of one kind or another... and all of us leave an inheritance for others of one kind or another. It may be money, it may be values or possessions, it may be ideas, it may be faith, it may also be abuse and neglect, it may be self-hate, it may be bitterness. All of us inherit and all of us leave inheritance for others.

We are stewards of what we receive and what we leave for others in our wake.

Al's grandparents and parents were kind and wise stewards of their gifts. They were persons of faith who trusted in God's grace and goodness. We benefitted and learned from their wisdom. We were fortunate... we were blessed. Their foresight helped to pay for Al's care in Alzheimer's units for four years. Without their love and care, I don't know what I would have done.

Some of us are inheritors of abuse: emotional, physical and sexual. Some of us are inheritors of self-understandings that were formed by loathing and contempt; some resulting from the racism, homophobia, and sexism of our culture. Some of us were lucky to get out alive and intact.

Not all inheritances are positive and wonderful. So the question is, what do you do with the inheritance you were given? What do you do with a schedule of financial disbursements? What do you do with the regular beatings you took as a child? What do you do with the rape by someone you trusted? What do you do with the feeling that you will never be safe?

No matter what we were dealt in our lives, we didn't deserve it. If we got abuse – we didn't deserve it. If we were not loved – we didn't deserve it.

If we got financial disbursements from far-sighted grandparents – we didn't deserve it. If we were loved unconditionally – we didn't deserve it.

Each of us is a steward of what we received. What will we do with what we received? Will we pass it on? Will we be transformed by it... will the world be transformed for good? Will we be healed so that we can pass on something more whole and holy?

In our living, we leave something as an inheritance for others. What will that inheritance be? Will it facilitate growth and life? Will it allow the possibility of transformation for good in the world?

Each of us has such a choice every day.

As Jesus was preparing his friends for his departure, he told them about the inheritance he left for them. He told them he understood the difficulties of human living. He experienced suffering and the need of forgiveness. He walked the human journey and understands our pain.

And so his parting legacy was the gift of the Holy Spirit. He left an inheritance of presence... the presence of an active and creating force that is always with us... encouraging us – prompting us – clarifying for us – beckoning us...to commit ourselves to the transformation of the world, of all creation, as our inheritance to those who come after us. We are stewards of our lives, of the meaning of our lives.

How we live, what we leave for others... is the inheritance we leave for the world, indeed all creation.

Abraham Heschel wrote, "There is no human being who does not carry a treasure in his/her soul, a moment of insight, a memory of life, a dream of excellence, a call to worship."

God heals ... God transforms all our human experiences – if we allow it. God enables our lives to be a blessing to others.

The Holy Spirit is God's gift to you. A Gift that endures.

What inheritance do you leave for others? Especially knowing that you have no say in how it is received or used!

God gave the gift of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit... with no strings attached for how these gifts are received and used.

Our prayer is that we receive them with grace, and pass them on with humility and love... trusting in the giver of the greatest inheritance of all: Our loving God, who gives the gift of life, grace, and on-going transformation.

Thanks be to God.