

Stewardship Sermon 2009

From Madonna
Some boys kiss me, some boys hug me
I think they're O.K.
If they don't give me proper credit
I just walk away

They can beg and they can plead
But they can't see the light, that's right
'Cause the boy with the cold hard cash
Is always Mister Right, 'cause we are

Living in a material world
And I am a material girl
You know that we are living in a material world
And I am a material girl

Some boys romance, some boys slow dance
That's all right with me
If they can't raise my interest then I
Have to let them be

Some boys try and some boys lie but
I don't let them play
Only boys who save their pennies
Make my rainy day, 'cause they are

Living in a material world [material]
Living in a material world
(repeat)

Boys may come and boys may go
And that's all right you see
Experience has made me rich
And now they're after me, 'cause everybody's

A material, a material, a material, a material world

Living in a material world [material]
Living in a material world

First off, under threat of excommunication, yours, I implore you to never tell our bishops what just happened here. If asked I will deny everything, and absolve myself and my accomplices later.

But we need to laugh. Financially our world seems to be in the middle of global meltdown. There has been a tense, excited, roller coaster of a presidential election. And we are still in the middle of two wars. Whether we are excited about the election results or not, we are left to wonder if it will get worse before it gets better. So, in the midst of this heaviness, I proclaim that it is spiritually healthy to take a deep breath and to laugh. We need to laugh to gain perspective, to remember that we will get through this together, and to feel that what we ultimately value, God's love and joy, still abound.

Of course, it is true that the world we live in is a "material" one. To quote the song, "The boy with the cold hard cash is always Mr. Right." And whether we are a silly celebrity or a joe the plumber, our material world is currently fraught with anxiety. The natural human reaction to such anxiety is often to draw inward, to hide and hoard, to run away. As Madonna said, "If they don't give me proper credit, I just walk away." Self-preservation and advancement often become the goals. .

And yet, I want us, as a community and as individuals to question that approach. During my stewardship sermon, I want us to think about the material world not only in terms of our fears but also in terms of our faith. Because faith and trust are what is lacking in our world right now. After all, what makes money worth anything, at least since the gold standard has been lost, is our trust and our faith that such a piece of paper can be exchanged for the things that we need. Money is nothing more than a symbol of our faith and trust. "In God [or whomever] we trust." And what has broken down in our financial world is not only a lack of money. It is a lack of trust and faith in one another. And when trust breaks down in a relationship, the whole system is apt to collapse.

If our system, our relationships, are broken, only faith and trust will restore them. Luckily, this is an area in which Christianity and our faith in God can speak. As Christians, we do not put our faith solely in financial markets and material goods. To be broke financially does not necessitate being broken spiritually. We as Christians have the audacity to proclaim an absolute and total faith in the never-ending love of God. Even if we are without money, without health, and without family, we believe that God is still present with open arms. If the world crumbles, as it did around even God's son, we believe that we will not be left alone. And we believe that there will be resurrection and new life. In the midst of fear, we proclaim faith.

Which is why our stewardship committee chose the theme of faith in the midst of fear. We believe and want this place to be a place of faith in the midst of fear. We understand that we are all fearful. We understand that it is most difficult to consider pledging, sharing a portion of our income, and of being good stewards in these times. It is difficult to have trust and faith in God and one another when everyone is retreating in fear. And yet, that is the only way that we can continue to be a place of faith in the midst of fear.

You know, on a very personal note, I have to thank St. A's for allowing me to serve here. You know, being gay and being a priest are incompatible in my homeland of Oklahoma. I am a diaspora Oklahomo. And I have to say that to me, this has been a place of immense faith in the midst of fear. This is a place where we love one another, where we accept one another, a place where we help each other follow the love of God by loving and serving others together, even when the world does not. I am profoundly thankful to be a part of this congregation, especially because you have allowed me to serve in a way that even my own people would not.

And you have allowed me to be that same presence for you. Unfortunately, none of us knows what is coming, who will keep or lose their jobs, whose savings will be kept or lost, but we do know that we are here for one another, whatever does come. And I ask you to, no matter what happens, to continue to invest your faith and your trust in one another and in this place, in whatever way that is possible for you.

And isn't any place where the priest, treasurer, senior warden, and junior warden will lip sync Madonna worth supporting? The point is, we are living in a material world. But we are still a people of faith. Let us have faith in one another. Let us be good stewards of one another and of this place. I suspect that in the coming year, we will need one another and this place more than we ever have before.