

**20 Pentecost: October 17/18, 2009—Stewardship Sermon by Canon Lucas Grubbs**

*All things come of thee, O Lord. And of thine own have we given thee. +++*

In today's reading from the book of Job, God poses a question to Job. And as we hear this reading in church, the question is likewise posed to each and every one of us. It is a question, I believe, that is meant to shake us to the very core of our thinking, our reasoning, our very existence. Revisit this question with me for a moment: **Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely, you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?**

By asking this question, God is gently and yet very clearly reminding us of our place in the universe. **Where were we when God laid the foundations of the universe?** Whether you like to answer that question by the means of science or religion or both, I think we can all agree upon the answer: We were not even a twinkle in our oldest ancestor's eyes, that's where. **And on what were its bases sunk and who laid the cornerstone of the earth and the universe?** Again, science and our sacred texts have much to tell us about all of that. But the truth is, where the universe comes from and how the world was formed is still a dazzling and daunting mystery that we have very few hard answers for. It is a sacred and profound mystery. And so this question that God poses to Job and to each one of us succeeds in its task: Here is a rhetorical question that puts us in our proper place as human beings. We are small, comparatively insignificant creatures when we compare ourselves to the power and majesty and might and beauty of God and his creation and when we compare ourselves to the vast waves of time that have preceded us and our time in this mortal life.

And yet! And yet! Here we are. Flesh and bone, heartbeat and breath. We enter this world as infants, utterly dependent on others for our well-being. We grow up, we live, we learn, we succeed and we fail. We love and care, and sadly, sometimes we hate and disregard. We work, we rest, we play. Eventually, each one of us dies. In short, here we are on this absolutely stunning, miraculous planet called Earth. And you and I specifically, in this place called St. Michael's, along with all other people of faith, also have another thing going for us. Be it great or small, each one of us has an inkling of God's presence in our lives, that very God who laid the foundations of the universe. To some extent, great or small, we are aware that we are beloved children of God, made in God's image.

This text from Job allows us for a moment to contemplate everything that we have been given, everything that we have, everything that we are—even in a universe and a world that is too

vast for us to really and truly understand. Besides being humbled by all of this, the reaction that I ultimately have is one of joy—deep, abiding joy. And most importantly, the reaction that I have is one of the most important Christian virtues that any one of us can have. Gratitude. Great and awesome gratitude for all that we have been given. We did not make this world. Despite our strength, our intelligence and our cunning as a species, we are ultimately not the masters of this world. In everything in our lives, we have been given a gift that is beyond the poet’s words, the painter’s brush, the musician’s skill, and yes, perhaps even beyond the preacher’s craft. It is enough, perhaps to say, that we have been given everything, free of charge, by God’s good grace and God’s endless love and generosity towards us.

Here’s another quote, this time not a question, that I have always wanted to get into a sermon. It is perfect for the occasion of hearing God’s question to Job, and as a good Idahoan, it tugs at my heartstrings as I think it will for many of you: **“I never knew a man who felt self-important in the morning after spending the night in the open on an Idaho mountainside under a star-studded summer sky.”** (*Frank Church*) What the book of Job and Frank Church are both getting at is clear: Self importance, pride, vanity and selfishness must absolutely and totally go out the door when we take a look around and see what each and every one of us has been given.

But where do we go from here? All of us can come to the realization of what we have and what we have been given. After all, it isn’t much of a mental feat to realize this. But the big question for us is what do we do with that realization?

A number of weeks ago, the Dean and the Vestry of St. Michael’s offered a presentation on the history of St. Michael’s Cathedral. Like the very world that we inhabit, we are inheritors and members of a truly amazing community of faith, called St. Michael’s Cathedral. This PowerPoint presentation gave much of the history of this place: our founders and their contributions of leadership and skill, time and money. Our role in the earliest days of Boise: founding churches, a school that later became Boise State, St. Luke’s Hospital, our role in starting the long standing Boise Music Week. The list goes on and on. More than a mere presentation on our history, it was a presentation on the case for good stewardship of this place and our ministries. Remember what stewardship is: the duty that each and every one of us has for responsibly caring for what we have been given. If you did not see this presentation, I encourage you to go to the St. Michael’s webpage where you can view the Power Point version of it online. And when you do, you will read a quote that is deeply profound and yet wonderfully simple. It is a quote from our own Presiding Bishop, Katherine Jefferts-Schori: **“The fundamental reason for all acts of stewardship—gratitude for the abundance we have been given.”**

With the words of Job in mind, and with the call from our Presiding Bishop for the reasons that we are called to be good stewards of what we have, I would like to offer you my personal case for stewardship of St. Michael's Cathedral. Take a moment to consider the abundance that we have been given, and in fact, the abundance and the gifts that we participate in as members of St. Michael's. Here we stand in a Cathedral Church that shines as a beacon of God's love in the center of our city. Look around you and consider, from time to time, the people that make this place such a vibrant community of faith. We are a body that is young and old and everything in between. We come from all walks of life and with too many diverse experiences to even mention. When I came here two years ago, it wasn't long before I realized that the greatest strength of this Cathedral church is its people. That is all of you, as well as the leadership that the hard-working staff and clergy provide on a day-to-day basis.

But more than just the people, think of what St. Michael's means to you as an individual and to the Treasure Valley and beyond. **Baby Steps** is one of the most recognized outreach ministries in our area that helps expecting mothers and their families to prepare for the responsibilities of healthy parenting. We are blessed with **a music program** which is among the best in the valley. Michael Boney, our Canon Musician, is out-of-town this weekend, so I can say this without the risk of embarrassing him: He is one of the finest musicians I have ever known and he leads the music and worship of this place in ways making our lives truly enriched. Not to mention the numerous groups of musicians, concerts and recitals he is able to bring into our midst. Every day, **St. Michael's** serves the poor in our community through sack lunches, generous people at our thrift shop, contributions to our area's shelters, and now, the monthly hot and nutritious, dignified meal that we offer each month in **Come to the Banquet**. Children and youth formation are crucial to what we do as you see especially in our 9:15 service when it sometimes appears that the youth outnumber the adults. **Bill Wallace**, our youth director, and **Diane Bawcom**, director of Baby Steps and children's formation, make this a place of safety, warmth and welcome for our young ones—and they do it with love, dedication, talent and hard work. I could go on and on talking about the good that this place brings to our community and our world. But I have a feeling most of you know it already.

And so my case for stewardship is this: St. Michael's is an invaluable resource to each and every one of us. It is a place that nurtures us in our faith, our intellect, and our communal lives together, our bodies and our hearts. I dare say our lives are enriched more than we truly realize because of this place, the people that came before us, the people we are surrounded by, the people we are called to be. For each and every one of us, stewardship looks a little different. Some offer our time, some offer our money; all of us offer our presence. In the coming months and beyond,

the Dean and the Vestry of St. Michael's will be asking each and every one of us to prayerfully, thankfully, and joyfully consider what we have in this place. And most importantly, to respond in acts of generosity and giving that befit the people we are.

I cannot, in good conscience, stand before you and ask you to give of your time and money and talent without offering a few words on what I do. The reality is, I work here. So most all of my time is already taken. The way I respond then, is through giving generously of my money. And on a practical, pragmatic basis, money is what enables us to confidently engage in the work we have been given to do. My offering of money is the tithe of ten percent. Before I put my income toward anything else, I take that 10% off the top, and offer it back to the work of this church. I realize that that is a difficult thing for most of us to do, if we haven't been doing it already. But it is a goal, and a worthy one to shoot for. You would be amazed at how when you begin to give generously, how much more the seeds of generosity blossom in your life. So I would ask each and every one of you to consider the stewardship you offer in terms of your finances, and to respond out of a place of the gratitude you have for this place. A tithe is a sacrifice, to be sure. But all of our giving, be it from our time, our talents, or our money, should be a sacrifice of some kind. If you have not made a pledge to St. Michael's, I ask you to consider doing so. Remember, do not do it out of guilt, or compunction. Nothing good comes of that. But give to St. Michael's out of the gratitude you already have for this place. If you do pledge, I ask you to prayerfully consider increasing that pledge. Again, it may be a sacrifice. But more than anything, it should be a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

**Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely, you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?** Maybe we can't fully answer that question, but here we are, surrounded by the glories of creation, called to care for it as good stewards. **And where were we when the foundations of St. Michael's were laid?** None of us were there, but again, here we are, caretakers, beneficiaries and benefactors, stewards of this place. And remember the wise words of our Presiding Bishop: **"The fundamental reason for all acts of stewardship—gratitude for the abundance we have been given."**

*All things come of thee, O Lord. And of thine own have we given thee. Amen.*