



**From the Pulpit: November 13, 2022**

The Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

**The Reverend Dr. William A. Evertsberg**

Isaiah 58:6–9

*Stewardship<sup>3</sup>, II: Neighbor*

*Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the straps of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free?  
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover  
them  
and not to hide yourself from  
your own kin?  
Then your light shall break forth  
like the dawn,  
and your healing shall spring  
up quickly;  
your vindicator shall go before  
you;  
the glory of the Lord shall be  
your rear guard.  
Then you shall call, and the Lord  
will answer;  
you shall cry for help, and  
God will say, "Here I am."*

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generosity. This is faith.  
I love you for it."*

If we are faithful in all three tasks, our impact will grow not arithmetically, but exponentially. Today, the second task—our Neighbor.

Can I do a little math with you? We hope you'll pledge \$2.3 million this year to our Operating Budget, the care of our Faith Family. But here's the beautiful thing: every year we **give away** 10% of that figure. We never see it. It goes to the 40 Outreach Agencies who are caring for our neighbors who need it the most.

That 10% comes off the top. Not off the bottom. We don't give this money away if we have anything left after paying for everything else.

Our thinking is: God asks for a tithe, and if **anybody** ought to tithe, it ought be a **Church**. It is just as much a priority for our Operating Budget as paying the electric bill, giving the Senior Minister a place to live, and kibble to Doogie.

That's \$230,000. But then we do the Outreach Benefit and the Rummage Sale—we haven't been doing Rummage for a couple of years for various reasons, but we'll figure it out and do it again—we do the Outreach Benefit and raise another \$250,000, so we end up giving away almost a half a million dollars. This is splendid. This is generosity. This is faith. I love you for it.

**T**his fall I'm preaching this sermon series called *Stewardship Cubed*, or *Stewardship to the Third Power*, and my point is that God invites every member of Kenilworth Union Church to take good care of three good things—Our Faith Family, Our Neighbor, and Our Home.

We take care of our Faith Family through the Operating Budget, and we take care of our neighbor through the Outreach Budget, and we take care of our Home through the Capital Budget.

But that's not all. Do you know what the Bowen Fund is? It's the most creative retirement gift I've ever heard of.

When Gil Bowen retired here in 2007 after spending 38 years changing this place from a modest village parish into the machine of the North Shore, 675 Kenilworth Union Families gave \$3.2 million to the Bowen Fund.

The idea was that Gil and Marlene—who is now enjoying the blessed rest of everlasting peace—Gil and Marlene would distribute the proceeds of that endowment—about 5% a year—wherever they wanted to give it—to Holy Family Ministry, to the Night Ministry, to the Josselyn Center. It was your beautiful way of honoring your beloved Senior Minister.

So the upshot of all this is that Gil and Marlene have spent the last 15 years giving away \$1.5 million to our most deserving neighbors. Gil tells me he's had a blast for 15 years giving this money away. Thank you to Dick Thomas and Eddie James for coming up with this brilliant idea, and to the 675 families who made it happen.

By the way, even though Marlene and Gil have been giving all this money away for 15 years, the Bowen Fund is bigger today than it was when we started because its investments have appreciated faster than they can give it away. Gil and Marlene can't keep up! Thank God for the positive markets!

Now Gil and Marlene have completed their God-given task of distributing all these gifts to our deserving neighbors, and they're going out with fireworks. Their final gift from this Endowment will be \$1 million to establish a vertical farm in the Chicago neighborhood of Altgeld Gardens.

This is kind of a negative way of thinking about it, and I apologize for repeating this, but Altgeld Gardens is surrounded by highways, factories, and landfills and has been described as a "toxic doughnut;" you shouldn't grow stuff in the soil there.

It has also been described as a food desert. There is one convenience store in its confines and let's just say it doesn't look like a Whole Foods or Trader Joe's. Median household income there is \$15,000 a year. People don't have cars to travel to distant grocery stores. Kids don't eat the right stuff.

They asked one little girl how many servings of fruit and vegetables she'd eaten that day, and she said, "Two," and they asked her, "What did you eat?" and she said, "Two corn dogs." That's vegetables, right?

So the Bowen Fund is going to put a 500-square-foot trailer there that will hydroponically grow vegetables that otherwise you'd need **four acres** of crop soil to produce. I know I can't believe it either!

It's a miracle, like the wine at the wedding of Cana, where Jesus turned 150 gallons of common well water into a rich, red burgundy. These people are going to turn common well water into leaf lettuce, celery, and cucumbers that they can eat and sell at local farm markets.

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That's all because of the Bowen Family's wise and compassionate decisions and your generosity. Now that Gil and Marlene have completed their God-given task of giving all this money away to those who can really use it, what's left—and there's a lot left—will come back to the custodianship and the stewardship of Kenilworth Union Church, so what that means is that every year, this congregation has the income from over \$3 million to give away to our most deserving neighbors.

What will we do with it? I don't know, but we'll figure it out, and I will tell you what we **won't** do with it—buy computers or sheet music or pay the Senior Minister. We're going to give it all away to our neighbors. I'm having such a blast being the Senior Minister of a congregation with precisely these priorities.

Don't you love that passage from Isaiah I read a few moments ago? Quoting God Godself, Isaiah describes proper religious ritual and ceremony:

*Is not this the worship that I choose?*

*To loose the bonds of injustice...*

*To let the oppressed go free...*

*Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,*

*to bring the homeless poor into your house;*

*when you see the naked, to cover them,*

*and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*

What Isaiah wants us to know is that the worship of God is not internal, private, contemplative, and vaporous; but external, public, pro-active, and dense as lead. Look, I'm glad you pray your prayers. I'm glad you talk to the Almighty on a regular basis. I'm glad you read your Bible. I'm glad some of you fast during Lent. And I'm really glad that you come to divine worship every Sunday.

But according to Isaiah, that's not really what true religion is, or at least not **all** it is. The proper worship of God has its boots on the ground, goes to work, and dramatically enfleshes its existence. Proper worship puts the pedal to the metal, the rubber to the road, and the hammer to the nail, sometimes quite literally.

I don't even know where Altgeld Gardens is. I have never been there. Ordinarily, I would have no reason to go there. But one day soon, a bunch of us are going to go down there and we're going to **help**. We're going to learn how to grow strawberries vertically, out of water. Out of water! It's a miracle, like the wine at the wedding in Cana—cabernet sauvignon out of common well water—or like the five loaves and two fishes—a feast for 5,000 out of a little lad's limited lunch. That's not **arithmetical** religion; that's **exponential**, almost literally. Thank you for being part of the miracle.

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**—Prayers of the People—**  
**The Reverend Christine V. Hides**

Eternal God, as the last clinging leaves loosen their grip in the chilling air, we anticipate the shortening of the days in which we will light candles and keep watch for your coming. We read the words of the prophets who put human voice to your holy promises that we might hear you in a world of competing views.

By grace you free your people from the bonds of evil and injustice. Your mercy is the light which breaks forth as the dawn through the ages and calls people from every race and nation to be citizens of your holy realm. You show us the path of peace and healing.

You long for the time when the whole world will know your peace, harmony, and justice. A time when the instruments of war will be laid down and transformed into tools that nourish humanity and steward your creation.

Until your vision is fulfilled, until the wolf and lamb dine together, and nations no longer war; we remember the sacrifices of those who serve in the armed forces, the time spent away from home, their challenges greater than we can imagine, the loved ones who awaited their return; and for the healing of those who suffered physical, spiritual, and moral injury.

Holy God, let your comfort dry every tear. Let your peace indwell every troubled soul. Let your love soothe the pain of grief. Let your hope transcend every act of violence. We bring before you the deepest prayers before you in silence. Holy God, Let your hope and joy overflow in our lives.

Bless this holy sanctuary in which we gather. Inspire and unite this community of faith that we might pour out your love and care for the vulnerable, the hungry, the forgotten, and the weary.

As we pray the ancient prayer Jesus teaches.... Our Father.... Amen.

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