

From Turnips to Tithing

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Everyone loves a story. This story is titled "Stone Soup."

Three weary and hungry soldiers come to a small village hoping to find food and shelter for the night. They are met by shuttered windows and locked doors. The villagers are afraid because soldiers usually took what they wanted by force. Therefore all the food, staples, and valuables were hidden in dark cellars or buried deep in the forest.

The soldiers call to a house and ask the woman living there if they could use her cook pot. She peeks out the window and asks them, "To cook what? You obviously don't have anything to cook."

"O yes we do," said the soldiers. "We are going to make some delicious stone soup.

"What's stone soup?"

"It's so very simple and so very good. We learned to make it while we were in the fields of war. You take some water, and these three stones. Then cook them over the fire and soon you have hot soup to nourish the body and soul."

The skeptical woman replied, "I never heard of such, but if you will share your soup with me, I will share my cook pot with you." So the soldiers began to cook the three stones.

After a while they tasted the soup and declared, "This soup is almost good enough. But it would be so much better if it had a little bit of turnips."

"Oh, said the woman, I might have some turnips." And she hurried away to her cellar and brought a large handful of turnips to the pot.

Soon other people's curiosity got the best of them and they began to gather around the cook pot to wonder what stone soup would really taste like.

"This soup is almost ready", said the soldier, "and it would be so much better if we just had a little bit of salt."

"I have some salt," said a man watching the pot boil.

"How about some barley, I have some barley," volunteered another.

"Almost ready" said the soldiers, "If we just had a little bit of meat this soup would be the best stone soup ever." The butcher scampered back to his store and came back with his offering for the soup.

Soon, with the turnips, salt, barley, meat, and whatever they villagers thought might make the stone soup better, the soldiers declared the soup ready.

The soldiers and villagers all ate the soup, with bread amazingly provided by the baker. The whole village was fed and delighted in abundance.

After the soldiers took the cook pot back to the old woman they left town peacefully and with very full stomachs. As they were walking down the road, they heard someone declare. "Just think, we all ate and are full, and the soup is only made with three stones!"

One of the wonderful aspects of being in community is that we all bring our unique gifts to the work of the kingdom. God has gifted each of us with our talents, our gifts our resources and when we consecrate who we are and what we have to God, the banquet is set. God increases the harvest and bestows the blessing.

Stewardship of all we are and all we have is not something that is new to the man or woman who reads the Bible. The word "Give" appears over 2,000 times in the Bible. Followers of Jesus heard him talk often about treasures and barns, the poor, and the eye of the needle. Jesus was totally committed to his mission. He healed the sick, not partially but completely. He freed the captives totally. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said there is no way to be marginally transformed by Christ. In following Jesus there is radical, total reformation of the mind, body and spirit.

If so, then why do we wish to separate the stewardship of our resources from the Lordship of Christ? Do we think that our sins have only been partially forgiven? Do we believe that Jesus only loves some of us? No. there is complete forgiveness, complete salvation for all who will call upon him.

Several years ago my church participated in a combined worship service with a neighboring AME congregation. The singing, preaching, and encouraging "Amens" were incredible. I didn't know it but it was the tradition of this church to have a solo during the offering. A frail, 90+ year old black man, came to the front of the church. I thought he was going to pray but he said, "This is my witness" and started singing, "All to Jesus I surrender. All to Him I freely give. I surrender ALL." Now I don't think there was anyone who was wondering if they should give an offering that day. I don't think there was anyone who was debating the theology of surrender and consecration that was evidenced in that man's witness. We gave because the grace of God grabbed us and there was only the yearning for surrender in our hearts as well.

That's what consecration Sunday is. You and I know the call to consecration. It is not a Chapel agenda. It is the practice of those who offer all their sin, all their searching, all their talents, all their love to a God who can take the stones of our hearts, the bread in our baskets, and multiply it to grow the compassion and care of his Kingdom here and around the world.

I wonder what God would do in your life if you and I consecrated all we are, our talents, our money, our time to the proclamation of the kingdom, reaching the "poor in fact" and the "poor in spirit?" Who would God feed by word and deed in one of the schools this church supports? Like the East West Ministries which among other missions offers everything from training pastors to running orphanages worldwide. What child would hold the hope and joy offered though Samaritan's Purse or World Vision? What changes could happen when a man or woman hears the Gospel in their language through the work of the Wycliffe Bible Translators? What hope and encouragement comes when someone is ministered to locally at the Barnabas Center or in their new home built by Habitat for Humanity? These are just some of the 30 outreach ministries this church supports. These are not ministries that will necessarily bring people into worship and fellowship here at the Chapel, but these ministries are an **outreach** to those without the grace and good news of Jesus Christ. These are the ways we **reach out** to men and women, boys and girls sitting on the hillside waiting for the feast of God's love.

There are ways our consecration and stewardship ushers people into the presence of God here in this place. Maybe you are among those whose life seemed hopeless and without purpose. And in this place, and in fellowship, with these people, you found reason to sing, pray and believe again. There are so many who are seeking to understand the powerful promise of heaven- who come into this beautiful sanctuary and hear a prayerful and powerful sermon from your pastor, who sing the hymns of faith and hear music that lifts their soul. People whose hunger for hope is met because you brought your offering to God.

All of this happens through the faithful, consecrated tithes and offerings of a group of people who gratefully call themselves the Amelia Plantation Chapel.

God takes our turnips and our tithes and offers a banquet of forgiveness and grace. You see, when we consecrate ourselves to God, God multiplies it, not for our sakes, like the prosperity preachers proclaim, but for those who are hungry for hope and searching for a savior.

On Saturday, June 12, 1999, 150 men and women from Clanton, AL drove into Easley, SC and met under a huge revival size tent. Around them were piles of lumber, stacks of shingles, cases of nails, wire and PVC pipes. On the ground there was a large, 16,000sq foot, slab of concrete. June 13th they had church at that site and prayed for wisdom and protection and that God would use their talents as carpenters, electricians, roofers, plumbers, water carriers, cooks and "gofers" (That was my job) together, committed and consecrated to build a church home for the Summit Heights Baptist Church. Their theme was "God is Able."

On Monday morning, 6am, June 14, they started building, and they put up a wall every 6 minutes. When people left their homes going to work that morning there was only a slab of concrete on that corner. When they came home there was a church building in the middle of the crossroad. By the end of that week, June 18th, the walls were up, the windows were in and the roof was shingled. In one week they built the church building for Summit Heights Baptist Church, the church I served as pastor. What made that happen? The men and women of the Chilton Baptist Builders consecrated their talents to God. They built a beautiful house of worship.

Listen, **God is still Able.** Able to change lives, restore hope, heal the sick, lift our hearts to heaven. Will we consecrate who we are and what we have, can we sing, "All to Jesus I surrender, All to him I freely give."

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