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Job 1: 1; 2: 1 – 10
 Hebrews 1: 1 – 4; 2: 5 – 12

Ps. 26
 Mark 10: 2 – 16

“The sliver was a wicked one,” writes Carol Bechtel, in her book, *Glimpses of Glory*. “It was deeply embedded in our six-year-old daughter’s index finger. The moment of truth had arrived, though only after we had flushed her out from her hiding place behind the hedge. Ellen now sat constrained on her father’s lap, while I stood poised behind them with the tweezers.

“The operation commenced, a fact of which our entire neighborhood must have been aware,” she continues. “After several seconds of incoherent screaming (it seemed like longer), our daughter wailed, ‘I want my mommy!’ My husband and I exchanged stress-laden smiles. ‘You’ve got her, honey,’ I said, wielding the tweezers.

“Ellen gulped for air and tried again, ‘I want my daddy!’ ‘I’m afraid I’m in on this, too,’ said her father, grimly. Ellen’s stunned silence was but the calm before the storm.”

Whatever we do, we do in love. And sometimes, that part ‘whatever’ is really hard. As parents, as spouses/partners/significant others, as friends, as coworkers, as classmates, love is our intention and our motivating factor, but sometimes, what’s required by love is difficult. But when we ‘do’ for others, when we serve others, we are acting out of love for the people whom God has placed in our lives.

Our lessons today have something to say to us about human relationships and to that end, they also have something to say about loving and doing. Our lessons point to primary human relationships with self, other, the rest of Creation, and God. What do the lessons tell us? That, in the grander scheme of things, we humans are just a little lower than the angels. That we have been created to be in community and to be in intimate relationships. But that those relationships are not always easy, even when they are good.

Whatever we do, we do in love. That’s our theme this year for our fall Stewardship Program. And by doing what we do in love, we are exercising good stewardship over our relationships. We are nurturing them, tending them, protecting them. Often times, we think of stewardship only in the sparsest of terms – it’s when the church asks for money. And if we don’t hear the word ‘stewardship’ with ears of faith, then we miss the relevance that faithful stewardship has for all aspects of our lives, and it can certainly seem that it’s only about how much we will pledge. But stewardship is so much more.

Stewardship is the lens through which we, as faithful Christians, both see all of life and actually live it out. If we look through the lens of stewardship, we cannot help but gasp in awe and wonder at the interconnectedness of all of life, at the richness of this tapestry we call Creation, at the uniqueness and intricacy of the lives we’ve been given, at the complexities of our relationships. Everyone of us here at Trinity has been blessed beyond the wildest imaginings of most people in this world – with relative material wealth, safety and security, health care, safe food and water, the luxury of time to think and read and play and pray. We are blessed with rain and sun, rivers, forests and pastures, parks and gardens. We are each blessed with family and friends who fill our lives, and we are blessed with one another.

Is it all a bed of roses? Well, only if we realize that even in the midst of the velvety, vivid beauty of a rose, there are often thorns and Japanese beetles. Unpredictable and tragic things happen, like earthquakes and tsunamis – and mass shootings. Homelessness and poverty are a reality, even in the midst of our abundance. Our fractured relationships stare back at us through the abuse, violence and brokenness that are the stuff of daily headlines. There are the seemingly little wounds of slivers in a child's finger and the large, looming wounds of war, devastating illnesses and grief. It seems that daily, we are moving closer to a cataclysmic point of no return with the damage we are doing to Creation. There are people who seem to have everything, but who are empty shells, starving for what really matters in life – a relationship with God and relationships with others. In other words, love.

Whatever we do, we do in love. So perhaps while we gasp in awe and wonder that we are made but a little lower than the angels, perhaps we also ought to gasp – if not in fear and trembling, then at least in humility and gratitude – that God trusts us enough to care for one another and for all of Creation. God has charged us and trusts us with looking after ourselves, our relationships and Creation in a way that is equitable, sustainable and life-giving. That's a pretty responsible position in which to be. It's called being a good steward of all our relationships.

Whatever we do, we do in love. How are we doing with that? Are we good stewards of ourselves, or perhaps, to ourselves? When Jesus says "love your neighbor as yourself," he really means that we are to love ourselves – are we good stewards of our bodies, our minds, our spirits? Of how we are living and spending the precious amount of time that we call our life? If not, then how do we learn to love ourselves better?

Are we good stewards of others? Think for a moment about the people who are the biggest challenges for us and our ability – and sometimes our willingness – to serve them. They might be family members. They might be people who have hurt us. They might be people we find incredibly distasteful, or even reprehensible. They might be people we've never met, but who are on the national or international stage. They might be people who represent everything we think we oppose. They might be the sliver in our finger, the thorns in our rose garden. What would it take for us to try to see them through God's eyes? What would it take for us to realize that we are *not* our brother or our sister's keeper, as if they are an animal, but rather our brother or our sister's brothers and sisters, stewards of their welfare?

And then there is the rest of Creation beyond humanity, which we have done a pretty good job of dominating (*dominus*), but not necessarily stewarding and loving. If we continue to live in and contribute to a consumerist, built-in-obsolence, throw-away society and world, then how can we possibly claim "whatever we do, we do in love?" How do we use our buying and political power to shape policy and safeguard the environment for our children and their children? How do we get more involved in cleaning up the messes we have already created to help restore God's creation?

When we act in love, when we serve in love, then we are already being good stewards of our relationship with God. In the words of author, Frederick Buechner, we are being stewards of the 'Wildest Mystery of all.' But we might also need to tend to that relationship more directly. Do we spend time with God beyond just this hour or so on Sunday? If not, then how do we change that? How does *this* time inform us and transform us for the other days in the week, and for our other relationships? Do we share our experience of this "Wildest Mystery" with others? And do we share our experiences of others with the "Wildest Mystery?"

Whatever we do, we do in love. Here at Trinity, we do a lot. We do things for one another in terms of Christian formation, Pastoral Care and fellowship. And we do things for folks in this community and beyond. Former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, once said that 'the church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members.' And he was right. What we are about is going from here in peace to love and serve the Lord. Leaving to do the work that God has given us to do. Through our giving of ourselves – our time, our talents and yes, our treasure, we make God visible within this community and far beyond. That is what holy love looks like.

Stewardship is all about relationship. Stewardship is all about life. Stewardship is all about love. Stewardship is a way of looking at, appreciating and living life in the fullness that God intends. Stewardship is our grateful and loving response to the wild and mysterious, gracious and life-giving Creator of All. It may not always be easy. It may not always be perfect. It may not always look like what we expect. But in whatever we do as individuals and as Trinity, may we always do it in love. +