

## Sermon for November 20, 2016 – “The Black Spot”

Christ the King Sunday/Stewardship Sunday, Year C – Text: John 15:1-11

One day a professor entered the classroom and asked his students to prepare for a pop quiz. They waited anxiously at their desks for the test to begin. The professor handed out the question paper, printed side down. When all were handed out, he asked his students to turn over the page and begin. To everyone’s surprise, there were no questions, just a black dot in the center of the page. Very much like the one found in your bulletin. Seeing the expression on everyone’s face, much like the ones that I see on yours, the professor told them this: He said: **“I want you to write what you see there.”** The students, confused, got started on the inexplicable task. At the end of the class, the professor took all the answer papers and started reading each one of them aloud in front of all the students. All of them without exceptions, described the black dot. All trying to explain its position in the middle of the sheet, etc., etc. After all the papers had been read, the classroom silent, the professor began to explain. He said: **“I’m not going to grade on you this..I just wanted to give you something to think about. No one wrote about the white part of the paper...Everyone focused on the black dot. The same happens in our lives. We have a white paper to observe and enjoy, but we always focus on the dark spots.”**

Brothers and sisters...If there is one message on Stewardship Sunday it’s this. Our lives, all that we are, all that we have, are gifts from God. They are given freely with love and care not because we deserve it, far from it, No, they are given freely because of God’s grace. Such is the nature of a gift. So we always have reasons to celebrate. We’ve all received an abundance from God’s hands, therefore, each of us has something to contribute. Let me repeat that: each of us has something to contribute, something to give, something to give back. To our church, our community, our world. Unfortunately, we insist on focusing only on the dark spots. We insist on focusing on what we lack. You know the dark spots I’m talking about. And, while these dark spots are very small compared to everything else they’re the ones that pollute our minds. They divert our focus away from God and the things of God. They prevent us from hearing the still small voice of God and His call on our lives. They prevent us from living full as God intends. They make us anxious and fearful. They cause us to lose hope. They get in the way of us becoming the people God has created us to be. They tell us we don’t have enough – be it time talents or treasure, that we’re too old, that we’ve nothing to contribute. But, and here’s the thing about these dark spots...They’re lying! They’re lying!

Brothers and sisters, Advent begins next Sunday. Advent reminds us of the great truth that there’s a new world coming, always coming. It also teaches us that the new world doesn’t remove the reality of the old, at least not yet. Rather, the new world exists in the midst of the old one and the signs of suffering and trauma that we see each and every day? They’re not – **not** – an indication that God’s reign has failed, or that God’s not coming, or even that we need to wait for the time when all will be set right. Rather, the suffering we experience in this world is an opportunity, an invitation to encounter God and to help others do the same.

That’s the challenge of stewardship. It’s the call to embody now the grace and restoration of God. Our challenge, as we begin the Advent journey again this year, is to hold fast to faith. Our mission and our ministry is about living as best we can, in the midst of the struggling world, the hope-filled life of Christ our savior. Christ our King! So therefore, despair’s not an option. Neither is sitting on the sidelines. As I’ve said a number of times, faith is **not** a spectator sport. Faith is a living, breathing, identity-bending, life-changing, reality and as this morning’s readings reminds us...Faith without works is dead...

We must, therefore, be active. We must be all in. We must, as Jesus exhorts His disciples bear much fruit. This according to Jesus is how **our** joy is made complete. This is how **God** is glorified. So stop...Stop listening to the lies...Stop focusing on the black spots in life. Because there's **So. Much. More. White!** Let's focus on that. Let's focus on what we have. On what's truly important. Let's live joyfully and fully, hopefully and unafraid. Let's work together to help us become the church that God has created and calls us to be because working together is the only way it's going to happen. Let's give from our abundance. Let's give with grateful hearts in response for all that God has **given**...And for all that God has **done!**

Thanks be to God!

Amen and amen.