

Throw Caution to the Winds

2 Corinthians 9.8-11 (The Message)

Stewardship Consecration Sunday
October 17, 2010

God throws caution to the winds,
giving to the needy in reckless abandon.
His right-living, right-giving ways never run out...
- Paul of Tarsus (adapted)

Reading

God can pour on the blessings in astonishing ways so that you're ready for anything and everything, more than just ready to do what needs to be done. As one psalmist puts it, He throws caution to the winds, giving to the needy in reckless abandon. His right-living, right-giving ways never run out, never wear out. This most generous God who gives seed to the farmer that becomes bread for your meals is more than extravagant with you. He gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.

Everywhere I turn someone has an opinion about what the church needs in our day. Walk through a typical church parking lot after worship on Sunday and you will get an ear full. Turn on the radio and you are likely to hear some preacher going on about the ills of the day and just what the church needs. So many people seem to know what the church needs, in fact, that it's hard to understand why the church continues to struggle.

Everybody seems to know what the church needs, but it doesn't seem to help. So I would like to turn the question around and reflect for a few minutes this morning on what the church does *not* need in our day. What do you think? What would you put first on a short list of things the church does not need? We will get to an answer soon enough, but I would like to begin our time together with prayer. Would you please join me in an attitude of prayer?

Gracious One, we ask that you open our minds, our spirits, and our hearts to your transforming presence in these moments; so that we might discern what the church doesn't need in our day; so that we might clearly identify and discard that which stands

James R. "Bo" Crowe
Overland Park Christian Church

in the way of our faithfulness to your vision for our life together. In the name of the Christ we pray. Amen.

I hope you weren't concerned when you read the sermon title for this week – *Throw Caution to the Winds* - because when preacher types talk about throwing caution to the winds, it usually means they are working themselves up to do something they normally wouldn't dare do. For example, I once worked with a mild mannered, retiring young man who felt a call to ministry, and was given an opportunity to preach one last sermon in his home congregation before leaving for seminary. Well, let me tell you, this mild mannered kid threw caution to the winds and raked those good folk over the coals. He exposed, commented on, and harshly judged all their dirty laundry. He knew who smoked, who kept Playboy magazines in the garage, who acted like a big shot at church but never supported its ministry financially. He knew, and he let them know he knew. Needless to say, this was neither a healthy nor particularly uplifting experience for anyone, and it's not the way I intend to use the expression *throw caution to the winds* this morning.

Again, some pastors on rare occasions will throw caution to the winds and preach a sermon on justice issues. Justice is not an easy topic to address, not because it is absent from our faith tradition – believe me, the appeal for justice is there in spades! – but because the issues are often controversial and divisive. This is not the way I intend to use the expression *throw caution to the winds* today, because as you well know I often speak on justice issues. I am very aware that they often challenge our perspective and nudge us out of our comfort zone, but I cannot avoid justice issues for one simple reason, such issues and the people they affect are dear to God's heart. Our tradition will not allow me to ignore the appeal for justice, and remain faithful to my clear calling to respond to that appeal and invite you to join me.

You may not recognize the frequency with which I address justice issues, because I avoid the template approach to justice sermons, which calls for brow beating and an attempt to impose my vision of justice on you. I won't do that. I try, instead, to illumine the issues before us, offer some perspective from which a Christian might reflect on the issues, and invite you to discern your perspective in communion with God.

If I were going to speak on social issues this morning, I would suggest the need to add one simple ingredient to the national discussion; a clear sense of justice as fairness. As strange

as it sounds, this is what is lacking in our discussions around issues like health care reform, immigration reform, or the economic malaise that threatens us daily.

Most of the discussions I hear focus on the individual, more specifically on *me*, and demand to know what is being done for me, me, me... or what should not be imposed on me, me, me... the Bible, on the other hand, from the OT prophets to Jesus himself, encourages us to think of the community as a whole, and how that community should consider the needs of others as well as ourselves, the needs of those least privileged, those without power or voice, those without the means to take care of themselves.

Long before we address an issue from the perspective of political affiliation, we Christians should assess it from the perspective of a biblical sense of justice, and make our decisions informed by this view. This is not an easy thing to do, but I can suggest a rule of thumb that can help you make sure you are considering the needs of justice and not just your private needs. I suggest that you wear blinders when thinking through the issues; that is to say, assume that you do not know who you are in the equation. In terms of health care, for example, you don't know if you are a Bill Gates and can afford any health care package your heart desires, if you are an honest, hardworking single mother with two kids and three jobs, or if you are a lazy, shiftless good-for-nothing ready to sponge off of others. They are out there you know; the lazy, shiftless types; but if you want to avoid throwing out the baby with the bath water, fairness can only be approached by seeking the best for all involved, for you don't know who you are in the equation.

In terms of the economy, again, the issue of fairness would require that the economy be not only robust and growing, but fair as well. You see, a booming economy that doesn't address the needs of the weak, oppressed, and downtrodden is not fair in God's eyes, and it shouldn't be in ours either. What kind of economy would you want if you were a blue collar worker, an itinerate farm worker, or a middle-aged, highly skilled worker recently released without a fine how do you do? A fair perspective on the economy would consider the needs of all.

There's no doubt about it, if I were preaching on social issues this morning I would suggest the need to consider the issues facing us, all the issues, from the perspective of justice as fairness. But I'm not preaching on social issues, so that's not the way I intend to use the

expression *throw caution to the winds*. Rather, I plan to use it as Paul does in today's reading, as a description of God in relationship to you and me.

There's something comforting and empowering about the image of God throwing caution to the winds and giving us what we need. God doesn't measure the cost... God doesn't hold anything back... God doesn't withhold in fear of the well running dry. Quite the contrary, God throws caution to the winds and gives with reckless abandon.

That's the way God shares from the divine bounty with us. Grace, goodness, joy, peace, and comfort... it makes no never mind; God throws caution to the winds and gives with reckless abandon. Now you might say. Preacher, that's all well and good, but what does that have to do with our stewardship? This is, after all, consecration Sunday, the conclusion of our stewardship focus for this year. What does this image have to do with our stewardship? Plenty; for, you see, God is the model for our stewardship, as in all things.

Throwing caution to the winds, giving with reckless abandon; this is the way God wants us to give. Think about it. If we were to throw caution to the wind and invest ourselves with reckless abandon in the life and ministry of this faith community, Overland Park Christian Church, what do you think this community would look like in five years? Wow! I don't know about you but I hear boisterous laughter in the hallways, I see vibrant ministries of compassion and justice, unfettered fellowship, and just downright fun if we invested ourselves with reckless abandon in the life and the ministry of this church. What a difference it would make in the days, months, and years ahead.

We still have to answer the question with which we began. What is it that the church does not need in our day? I think you know what my answer is now. Our church does not need caution; none whatsoever. We need to throw caution to the winds and invest ourselves with reckless abandon in the life and ministry of this faith community. Are you invested with reckless abandon? There is a way to find out. Simply list the five most significant things this church has done for you. List the five most significant things that this church has done for you; and if one of the top three items on your list doesn't mention the opportunity to minister to *others*, the opportunity to serve *others*, the opportunity to reach out to *others* using your unique gifts and resources to invite God's reign among us; then you've got some caution left to

throw to the winds. That's what God wants us to do today; throw caution to the winds and invest ourselves in our shared ministry with reckless abandon.

Paul mentions at the conclusion of this passage that God provides the seeds that produce the harvest; that God gives to us that we might have something to give away. We are invited, in fact, to be the seeds that mature and produce the harvest, the seeds that produce fully formed lives within our fellowship and beyond. So, God invites us to throw caution to the winds and be the seeds that produce compassion, love, goodness, and joy; beginning here in this faith community.

We're going to take a few moments to reflect in prayerful silence on our individual stewardship commitment to God through this faith community. If you have retained your pledge card for today's celebration, I invite you to consecrate your gift to God in prayer, and place your commitment card in the offering plate as it comes around. Please, I invite you now to bow your heads, close your eyes, and offer to our God of reckless abandon a prayer of consecration for your stewardship pledge.