

I come in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

These weeks in November draw our attention towards the end times, the culmination of all of creation. You may notice that the Alleluias have been temporarily removed. The Eucharistic Prayer will a bit more encompassing.

This is not meant to be a somber or penitential time, but rather a time of reflection. We are reminded that there is a reality beyond us, a vision that is beyond ourselves. We can reflect without distraction. We can reflect with purpose. Reflect with thanksgiving. Reflect on our investments. It sounds like a lead up line for Stewardship Sunday. Yes! That is exactly what it is. But, don't tune me out, just yet.

Stewardship, by definition, is the job of supervising or taking care of something. This Sunday, I ask you to reflect on how you invest in your relationship with yourself, with others, the earth, and with God. In what do you invest to take care of yourself? How do you invest in taking care of others? How do you take care of the earth? How do you invest in your relationship with God?

In our reading from 1 Kings, we hear about the widow who gave her last bit of food to Elijah, recognizing that her situation was hopeless. Imagine if you had just enough food for one more meal, knowing you will succumb to starvation. After hearing Elijah, the widow invested all she had in a vision of hope and

thanksgiving. That vision was revealed to her by Elijah, and she was drawn into it, in a relationship that was beyond herself.

In our Gospel reading, the wealthy patrons gave great sums of money from their abundance, which in no way diminishes the gift they gave. But they had no investment in the relationship, no vision beyond themselves. It was merely a self-serving transaction in which their ‘generosity’ would be rewarded with public honor and status. It was all about them. It was not the wealth that Jesus called out, but rather the selfishness and insincerity that came with it. When the widow gave her last two coins, it was an expression of her commitment to her relationship with God. It may have been an expression of thanksgiving, with a vision greater than herself.

Could investing in visions beyond yourself actually form you to be a good steward of creation? Could taking care of creation be good for you, and your well-being? Could taking care of your neighbor actually come back to you in goodness and care? Could being invested in your relationship with God give you wholeness and joy? Allow me to share a story about an event in which a person invested in a relationship beyond himself, that ultimately granted him wholeness and hope.

On April 12, 2019, Micah Herndon, a Marine, ran the Boston Marathon in memory of three fallen comrades who lost their lives in Afghanistan. Mark Juarez, Matthew Ballard, and Rupert Hamer fell victim to an IED. Micah Herndon stated, “When that bomb went off, I too was injured, a moral injury that tore into my soul, throwing off all sorts of spiritual shrapnel.” Being their superior officer, he felt responsible for their deaths.

When Micah returned from fighting overseas, he faced obstacle after obstacle. Finding employment was difficult. His marriage was falling apart. Survivor’s guilt tortured him. Why did **they** die, and he live? His relationship with himself, with others, and with God was broken.

He had to find a way to cope, a way to heal. He decided to take up running. It was a way to channel his pain, the pain of guilt. He said, “I knew those guys were in heaven – they’d done their best. I wanted to do my best for them here on earth. I started this habit of praying names as I ran. Inhale—“Ballard”—exhale. Inhale—“Hamer”—exhale. Inhale—“Juarez”—exhale.

He said, “I feel as if I am trying to put my soul together with every mile I run, outpacing the guilt that exploded that day on the battlefield. Every mile I run draws me closer to God.” Every day, he ran a little further, a little faster, staying close to them.

So, on April 12th, Micah began the 26.2-mile run with 26,631 other runners. “Ballard, Hamer, Juarez” “Ballard, Hamer, Juarez” Running step after step, mile after mile, Micah prayed the names of his friends. “Ballard, Hamer, Juarez” When he felt tiredness or weakness coming on, Micah prayed all the harder. “Ballard, Hamer, Juarez”

At mile 22, exhaustion began to creep up on him, and his legs began to stiffen up. Yet, he kept on praying. “Ballard, Hamer, Juarez.” Mile 24, “Ballard, Hamer, Juarez.” Mile 26, “Ballard, Hamer, Juarez.” With the finish line in sight, Micah’s legs simply gave out, and he fell to the pavement. He could not get up. Yet, he could not let them down. “Ballard, Hamer, Juarez.” He would not be deterred from honoring his friends. “Ballard, Hamer, Juarez.” So, spending all of his remaining energy, Micah crawled those last 100 yards to the finish line.

26,632 runners completed the race. It is truly a significant accomplishment. It is noteworthy! I imagine that many of them, although tired, were still blessed with abundance – abundance of strength, abundance of stamina. The question is, ‘Why did those 26,000 athletes choose to run the marathon?’ What is for pride, honor, and recognition? Was it for self-improvement, a self-set-goal? Or was it an expression of investment in a greater cause? For Micah, he gave every last ounce of his energy. He sacrificed his own well-being as an expression of remembrance, a relationship.

His race was completed with a vision that was outside of himself. In our reading from Hebrews today, we hear how Jesus had a vision outside of himself. He gave everything he had, not for recognition, status, or honor, but to be our advocate, our intercessor, to be our Savior. He gave his all as an investment in His relationship with us and with God. In his sacrifice, we, too, find healing and wholeness when we live into that vision, that relationship.

In this time of reflection and thanksgiving, imagine how you can invest in a vision outside of yourself, how you can take care of all that God has given you. You may say that you have nothing to offer. Yet you have so much to offer! Last week I preached on stories. Imagine giving the gift of wisdom by sharing your story with others, bringing it to life for future generations. Imagine giving the gift of joy by singing a song with a child. Imagine giving a gift of compassion by supporting someone during difficult times. Imagine giving the gift of companionship by striking up a conversation with someone sitting alone. Imagine giving the gift of faith by inviting someone to worship with you, or to pray with you. It is not the size of the presents that you give, but rather the size of your presence. Every person here is full of gifts. Every person here has so much to offer.

We are all in different places in our lives. Each of our stories is unique and sacred. But, in unity, we are called to be good stewards of our relationships, with the earth, with each other, with ourselves, and with God.

No one is asked to give of themselves beyond what they are capable, but rather to invest in each of these relationships to the extent possible. It is offering yourself, as you are, who you are, right now, here today!

So, may your gifts be abundant! May you share them generously and carelessly! May you have a vision of joy as you take care of each other, knowing that you are God's gift to all of creation – a gift to all of God's creation!

Remember, God's story of creation will never be the same because you are here!

What a gift! Amen.