

## **Sermon – Sunday, July 31, 2022**

**Rev. Randi**

One offertory statement sometimes used is, "All things come of thee, O Lord, and of Thine Own, have I given thee."

The statement expresses that the possessions and blessings we have come from God. In giving, we merely return a portion of those blessings to God.

Contrast this with the concept of a Self-Made Man (or Self-Made Person). The phrase Self-Made Man was invented by Henry Clay. He first used it in a speech to the US Senate on Feb. 2, 1842, to refer to someone whose success we attribute only to internal forces but nothing outside themselves. Frederick Douglass developed the concept further through his writings so that it often refers to someone who rose from poverty to great success, mainly by their own doing. In our culture, we often seem to use the words as a compliment.

When individuals rise from the bootstraps to become successful, some celebration is good. Hard work and saving are virtues. But the problem comes from believing that any individual can do this through their inner forces. The situation worsens if we who call ourselves disciples believe we are self-made. God makes this possible. God created us and gave us the gifts and grit to achieve. Now, before those of us who lack high-paying jobs or full storehouses check out of this Gospel saying it's not relevant to them, I want to say that as long as we have some blessings, this Gospel is still relevant to us. Even if all we have are people who love us, God is our benefactor. After all, God created them and us to be in relationships. God created those people who love us with the capacity to love, and God created us to receive love in return. Whether the blessing is money or fame or love, we have it because God gave us the means to attain it. We aren't Self-Made.

For the past several weeks, we've been talking about the traits of good disciples of Jesus. We talked about prayer, love of neighbor, focusing on God above all the world's distractions, telling others about Jesus, and being kind. Today, we talk about a discipleship trait that has to underpin our whole life and service to God. That trait is the realization that all we are and all we have is because of God. Without God, we wouldn't even be born. Without God, we'd have no capacity to work or to play. Without God, we'd have no capacity to love and to be loved by others. Out of this realization comes our ability to be kind. Out of this realization comes our desire to tell others about God. Out of this realization comes our persistence in trying to love our neighbor, even though sometimes it's difficult, and sometimes we fall short. Our desire to remain in communion with God through prayer comes from this realization. We realize that we are called, and are required, to be faithful stewards of everything God has given us – gifts, talents, blessings, and possessions. Faithful stewardship includes saving for the future, but it also includes doing what we can to be sure others have what they need today. It also means using the resources to sustain the welfare of all of God's creation for a long time.

Patting OURSELVES on the back for OUR hard work and using what we have to live large while ignoring our stewardship responsibilities is a sin.

Working hard and accumulating nice things is OK. God wants us to be happy. But the problem comes from believing that because WE did all the hard work, WE deserve to keep all the spoils of our labor. No individuals are self-made, although some think they are. We are all God-made. And we're God made to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth. When the Kingdom of God is on earth, those with many possessions freely offer up those possessions for the common good. We offer them in the spirit that these possessions aren't really ours in the first place. They are God's. And no matter how much we give to others, we can never outgive what God gives to us. Even those of us who tithe and frequently give to outreach still have a long way to go to be like God.

We become truly transformed disciples of God as we recognize that everything comes to God. God has given us blessings – whether monetary or nonmonetary – for the common good and not merely to fill our own storehouses. But God hasn't given them just so we can sit back on our laurels and think about how smart we are. God has given them so that we can use them to be the change in the world we pray for.