

I enjoy rainbows, those grand arcs of multi-hued light splashed across the sky. They give me a sense that the sun has finally broken through the clouds, whatever rain that caused them is now quickly fading away. Rainbows are such lovely unexpected gifts of nature. While I am not an expert on rainbows, there are a number of things that I do know about them.

First, in order to see a rainbow, you must look for it. You won't see a rainbow looking down at your feet; you have to look up at the sky to see one. Granted, a rather basic fact, yet we often forget to look up. We have to take the time from whatever we are doing to look for a rainbow, to remember to look up. If we are plodding along, focused on our own feet, our own individual steps, we will never see a rainbow.

Stewardship is much the same. We need to remember to think about our stewardship, to take time to look up from our daily activity; look beyond our own two feet. Just as we need to remind ourselves to focus our eyes on the sky, looking for rainbows, we need a reminder to focus on all the things about stewardship - our time, our talents, our resources - to focus upon the gifts that we have been entrusted with by God.

Second, in order to see a rainbow, you must be facing the right direction. The sun must be at your back as you look up at the clouds in front of you. The sunlight strikes the drops of water in the sky, each drop acts like a miniature prism as it breaks the sunlight into the familiar spectrum of colors. The sunlight comes from behind you,

enters the raindrop, is dispersed into the colors, and then is reflected off the back of the raindrop back towards you. The beautiful and gentle colors are invisible, overwhelmed, if you are looking at the glare of the sun.

Again, stewardship is much like this. You can not see the beauty of life if you are facing the wrong direction. Our stewardship gifts touch lives in many beautiful and gentle ways. If we stare into the glare of the world, at all the distractions of life, we will not see the impact of our stewardship gifts. But also, if we only focus on ourselves, if we only focus on what God has given to us, then we will not be seeing the opportunities to use those gifts. These gifts are not ours to hold onto but rather gifts to be shared, to be used, for the benefit of those around us.

When we turn away from the glare of the world, we can lift our eyes to God. When we take the time to turn off the distractions (TVs, iPods, cell phones or excessive work hours) we can focus on the subtle beauty of God. The Philippians verse found on the stewardship brochure that you have received tells us that we have a choice about what we look at, that we can think beyond ourselves. "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things."

We can control what we think about - and these are some encouraging words about what we should think about. We do not have to think about only those things others, be it television or newspapers or neighbors, tell us to think about. These other

sources try to redefine life in base, even vulgar, terms. Seldom does what is pure or lovely or admirable make the news. Movies and television predominately feature what is no longer right or noble or pure. We can, and should, think about these things as we turn to God who is the source of what is pure and praiseworthy.

Part of the pure beauty of God is the fruit that we receive: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, and Faithfulness. These are rightly portrayed as parts of a rainbow in that we have to look up to see them, to look beyond ourselves. Also, we need the light of God to see them in their full splendor. Like rainbows, the splendor of the fruit gives me a sense that God has broken through the storm clouds. Just as the sun is always there, beyond the storm clouds, God is always here, before, during, and after the rain storms of life. This beautiful fruit is what is noble and pure and lovely, the things that we should think about.

Just like light entering a raindrop and being diffracted into the individual colors, the fruit of God enters into us. We are the prisms that diffract the fruit into its individual components for others to see. Yet, we ourselves need to be able to see this fruit, both in ourselves and in others. The brochure encourages us to take each one of these colors of God's love and think about them for a day. It also offers some creative ways in which we can practice each word in some specific way next week, and every week.

Seeing and practicing each word is important. If we only look at God, if our only focus is on ourselves and God, then we are missing what these gifts are about. It is

when we turn to face outward, toward the world around us, with God's light behind us, that these things start to provide beautiful reflections for all to see. If we want to improve our lives and improve our relationship with God - and that is what stewardship is all about - we have to think with a purpose. That purpose becomes sharing the fruit that we have received with others. As we share the love we have received from God, we start to become a bright rainbow in a colorless world. When we share our peace with the world, when we become peacemakers, then others can start to see God's glory reflected in our lives. With God's gifts and light, we reflect each component of the fruit of God out into the world.

Another fact about rainbows is that we can not hold on to a rainbow, saving it to be viewed whenever we desire nor share it on demand with a friend. If we are fast, we might be able to share a rainbow with someone if we can quickly get them to the exactly correct place. Normally, the best we can do is to capture an image of a rainbow. We might preserve the pastels in a photo, elegantly describe a rainbow in poetry, perhaps stylize one in a painting.

Stewardship is also much like that; we can not hold onto God's fruit, hoarding it to ourselves nor statically displaying it for others. There is little meaning in kindness or patience without putting them into action with others; there is no way to capture such fruit if we only grasp tightly to it, without putting it into the action of our daily lives. We cannot hoard the gifts and bring them out only to show certain close friends on

demand. Like a rainbow, these gifts are to be shared with the world around us.

We do not, can not, capture the fruit of God even in photos or paintings. We have been created in the image of God. As we let God's light shine through us, as we let it be reflected off of us into the world, then the world can see this rainbow of God's love. We become the image of God that others can see. If we want the world to see God's love, we must allow our gifts to be illuminated by their source, by God. If we want the world to see God's love, we must share our rainbow of fruit with the world around us.

Part of our faithfulness is sharing what God has loaned to each of us. This is a congregation that has faithfully shared. Looking forward to the mission trip, sharing time and talents, looking forward to a new pastor, sharing encouragement and resources, there are many reasons to continue your faithful stewardship.

Stewardship is like rainbows in many ways. It requires us to look up, beyond ourselves. Stewardship is turning away from the glare of the world, toward God, to see the remarkable beauty of what we have been given. Stewardship then requires us to turn outward, sharing our fruit with others. And stewardship is letting the light of God illuminate us, acting as prisms so that others might see God through us.

Perhaps this sermon is mis-titled as "Look for Rainbows". Perhaps it should have been called "Being a Rainbow". When we are focused on stewardship of all that God has given us, be it the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and faithfulness, or be it the skills and talents that we have been given, the time to use those

talents, or the more tangible treasures that we have been entrusted with, then, and only then, do we become a rainbow that brings beauty and peace, and God, into this world.

Stewardship is about becoming a rainbow.

Lord, thank you for the beauty of rainbows, for the beauty of the gifts you have entrusted to us. Guide our thoughts as we think about what is pure and noble and praiseworthy. Move us to action, putting the rainbow of your fruit into the action of our daily lives. Through this action, may others see your glory, sense your love. Amen.