

January 22, 2024

Dear co-workers in the kingdom,

It took many years for me to appreciate winter. Childhood memories of cold feet and frozen fingers, combined with the hassle of shoveling and scraping, slipping and sliding, often left me in a grumpy mood until spring. Attitude makes all the difference, though. Seeing the unique joys and opportunities winter provides helps me overlook the hassles, which is good since winter comes whether I want it to or not!

In many ways, the season of winter serves as a metaphor for the financial season we experience in Midland and in our nation. Like an arctic front that puts us in a winter deep freeze, we are feeling the winds of economic uncertainty. Inflation continues to bite into buying power, and there are mixed messages as to where the economy is going. Hard times, like cold winters, do indeed come from time to time.

I don't want you to think I am predicting trouble. We never know the future until we get there. My point, though, is that whether or not it happens soon, hard times WILL come eventually. As will good times. We don't control this any more than we control the weather. The scripture directs us not to worry about what the future will bring, but to TRUST in the one who promises to be our Good Shepherd.

So it is once again time for our annual stewardship campaign. This is a time when we invite you to reflect on the teachings and promises of God and to grow in your own personal faith as you consider your stewardship of the gifts that God has richly given into your life. Such consideration must unavoidably include giving, and anxieties about inflation and the future economy are a perfect background for remembering that giving is directly connected to FAITH.

Permit me to illustrate with a story:

Many years ago there was a businessman traveling from town to town on foot in the heart of winter. On the way he encountered an unfamiliar river. The river was frozen, but he was unsure whether the ice was thick enough to support him. He looked in vain to find tracks or a sign that would indicate the river was safe to cross, but the winds had swept away any trace. He knew that he had to get across, but he was afraid. Finally, beginning to get cold, he eased himself out onto the ice. After a few steps his nerve failed and he dropped to his hands and knees, inching his way across and listening for any sign that the ice was cracking. Some way into this painfully slow crossing, he heard the sound of singing behind him. A large sleigh came into sight with a full load of coal, and without hesitating the driver took it across the river, singing all the way.

It is amazing the difference that confidence can make in our attitude.

God is our refuge and strength. He is a very present help in times of trouble. Do we dare to believe that? Do we creep on our hands and knees with fearful hearts, with anxiety that any moment might bring disaster? Or do we go on our way joyfully trusting in the one who has given us all good things, confident that even unplanned changes will work to our good, just as the scripture says?

That is our challenge this year. That is the theme of our stewardship: Faith. God is trustworthy to provide what we need, and any changes we may face do not shake the confidence we have in the one who does not change, and who has loved us with an everlasting love.

Over the next few weeks, you will receive further food for thought on this challenge of faith. Then, on February 11, loyalty sunday, you will have the opportunity to bring forward a pledge card indicating the amount you intend to give for the support of St. John's in the coming year. Whatever amount you choose to pledge--whether it be more or less than previous, or the first time you pledge--make it your goal to give joyfully and with confidence in the Lord's promise.

Until next time, please read and consider the words of **Luke 14:7-35**.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Kempin