

Sunday, November 7, 2010

Hear the pennies dropping,
Listen while they fall.
Ev'ry one for Jesus,
He shall have them all,
Dropping, dropping, dropping,
Hear the pennies fall;
Ev'ry one for Jesus,
He shall have them all,

Dropping, dropping ever,
From each little hand,
'Tis our gift to Jesus,
From His little band.

Now while we are little,
Pennies are our store,
But when we are older,
Lord, we'll give Thee more.

If we have not money,
We can give Him love;
He will own our offering,
Smiling from above.
chorus

F H De Witt, c 1890

T: "Hear the Pennies Dropping", Wm J Kirkpatrick, 1890

Singing this children's hymn by William Kirkpatrick, written in 1890, was the earliest memory I have of God and the church. I must have been about 3 or 4 years old and I can still see myself in that cozy Sunday School classroom with felt boards and pictures on the wall and a kind woman playing the piano while we sang our little song. It made sense to me as a little girl that Jesus wanted us to share the pennies we had with those who didn't have anything. The sound of the pennies clanging together as we each added a few to the plate has stayed with me. This memory eventually was replaced by Lenten mite boxes and little coin folders where we would fill the slots with coins for the mission field. This was my introduction to stewardship.

To me, stewardship is giving not only money, but my time and talent as well. My stewardship journey has been interesting and there have been times when I have had plenty to share and times when I had nothing and had to rely on others for support.

I grew up in a loving home with my parents and four brothers. We didn't have a lot of money to spare, but we were like everyone else in the neighbourhood with a fairly large family. My parents encouraged me to share of myself and my time and always supported me in things outside my comfort zone. (going to Mark's friend's house for dinner and my reaction to the love there). One thing was certain: we never talked about family money. It was a private thing, never to be discussed. We had an allowance and were encouraged to give some of it to the church for God's work, but we were mostly shielded from the day to day issues of money. That was adult business. How I spent my little bit of money was up to me. I don't think I gave it a whole lot of thought and growing into adulthood, I continued to share some of my treasure. It wasn't a lot as I recall. I was a self-supporting student with the accompanying student loans and minimum wage jobs to fund my education.

After we were married and our first child, Melinda, was born, I felt more and more how much we had been blessed. I was married to a wonderful man, I had a beautiful, healthy daughter, we had food to eat and warm shelter and careers to interest and challenge us. We were still students and didn't have a lot of money and we tried to give responsibly to the church. When we moved back to California after Jim completed his residency at the vet school in Guelph, we realized a huge jump in our resources as Jim landed his first job as a veterinarian. It was a very modest salary, but we felt rich compared to living as students! Right around this time, we returned to the church I had been involved with in southern California.

All Saints Pasadena was and still is a wonderful faith community. Soon after our return, it was stewardship time and we were really challenged to look at our stewardship of time, talent and treasure. And then they started talking about tithing! 10%!! Wow! Was this possible in modern times? Everything was so expensive and we were only starting out. We wanted to buy a house, provide for the family and still share, but how would we do it? Several people would stand up and talk about their faith journeys and their stewardship journeys and challenge the congregation to think about their own response. All Saints is now a tithing community.

Since Jim and I were not used to having much money, we looked at our budget and figured out if we could tithe. We were surprised to find out we were able to meet the challenge. We decided at that time that we would commit the first 10% of our income to God's work in the world. As Jim had salary increases, the first thing we would do was adjust our pledge upwards in response to the blessings we had received. Our family grew to include Nathan and Noel and we were on top of the world. Life was good, we were happy and we were able to share our treasures, time and talents with others. We were involved with many ministries in the church, including running a support group for young families, Union Station, which was a drop-in centre for the homeless and lonely, dinners in the park at all the holidays, Sunday School, and the children's choir. Our life revolved around the church. I wish the stewardship story ended here, but it continues.

After a few years of so much happiness and blessing, tragedy struck us. My wonderful husband was caught up in the cycle of drug addiction and was not able to escape from

it, despite many tries at rehabilitation. It became clear that I needed to focus on the children and let Jim focus on his recovery. I decided to return to Canada and I left my support network behind to start fresh. Perhaps I was naïve, but I thought that I wouldn't have a problem finding a job and picking myself up again. I was in for a shock when I learned that my license to work as a medical lab tech was not recognized in Canada. Around this time, I also found out how much I would need to pay for child care so I could go to work. It seemed that I had an impossible problem. I was on a waiting list for subsidized child care. I returned to school for some additional training and was given a subsidy for child care. I had to rely on mother's allowance and that was a very humbling and difficult experience. I was used to being the giver and not on the receiving end. I used to cry every month when I received the cheque. I couldn't understand why this had happened to our family. I think I had to spend about 60% of the cheque for rent. This didn't leave much for donations and I felt guilty not be able to share much. This situation lasted for a few years until I again found employment. It took several years to really get on my financial feet again and during this time, I wasn't tithing but was trying to do what I could.

A few years ago, I started thinking again about tithing. It wasn't something that was talked about much, especially at church. Again there was the discomfort about discussing money. I had many talks with myself about what my response would be and thought of all the reasons why I couldn't or shouldn't tithe. I'm nearing retirement and need to save for the future, my mortgage needs to be paid and there are lots of trips to take and ways to spend my money. No one was talking about tithing. It didn't seem Canadian somehow. So why was I thinking about it? It just wouldn't go away. I can remember a talk I heard at a conference a few years ago and it really stuck with me. The speaker said that being born in Canada was as if you had won the lottery for life when compared across the world's stage. Yes, I had won the lottery. I was abundantly blessed in everything that life had to offer. It was this shift in perspective that finally convinced me to start tithing again.

Perhaps it's a little more sexy to give to things that are visible and see the dollars add up to find a cure to a disease, but to contribute to the work of the church is equally important to me. Yes, I support other charitable causes and get involved in other opportunities to make a difference, but my first priority is to the church.

I have been provided with incredible opportunities and even some "opportunities for growth" or set-backs. I have gone from sheer bliss to despondency, from having riches to having nothing. I have never doubted God's presence in my life. Throughout my life's journey, the church has always been there for me. My faith has been nurtured and challenged, welcoming arms have embraced me and supported me and I have learned how to live my faith through the example of the many faithful Christians around me. I want to ensure that others will always have the support that I have had. I want to see the church be more involved in mission and doing God's work in the world. Yes, it costs money. We need to pay for the basics such as our Parish Fair Share, salaries, heat, hydro, telephone, snow removal, grounds maintenance and repairs before we even start

on new ministries. But I want the church to continue and it does cost money. Money that we have! We only need to release it.

I challenge you to challenge yourself. Maybe no one has asked you to consider tithing before. That was my experience many years ago. But go ahead. Think about it. Respond with your heart. All I know is that out of my gratitude for all the blessings of this life, I gladly tithe my treasures to support this place, the community within it and the community around it. My response is that I cannot give enough.