All things come of thee, O God, and of thine own have we given thee. (1 Chron 29:14, KJV)

Our scriptural reference for this year’s stewardship campaign is one I (and perhaps many of you) recall from every Eucharist I attended as a teenager (pre-1979 Prayer Book). It was one of the service hymns often sung or sometimes said as the offering plate was walked up to the altar immediately before the Great Thanksgiving. We have recently revived this practice at St. Matthews. This sentence is a literal reminder as the offerings of the people are made that all we have is from God and through our offerings we are returning to God what is God’s, as instructed by Jesus in today’s Gospel lesson.

Returning to God what we have received from God may sound similar to returning an umbrella you borrowed as you were leaving a friend’s home during an unexpected downpour. Yes, you really needed that umbrella and it was useful during that semi-emergency as you were walking from her home to your car – but did you return it right away? Or even the next week? There probably was no urgency for you to return it right away as the next few days were clear and sunny, and, if you are like me, the umbrella rode with you in the trunk or backseat of the your car as you drove to work, the grocery store, the drug store, the gas station, the post office, probably even to St. Matthews, and everywhere but back to your friend’s home. You really appreciated the umbrella then, but did you return it promptly? Did you return it with gracious thanks? As long as the skies are sunny and without
clouds, you can forget that you even needed the umbrella? Is it still in your trunk?

Our stewardship scriptural passage is a marked departure from past years as it is not from the New Testament but from the Old. King David sought and obtained unprecedented contributions of financial support and hands-on talent of all craftsmen for the building of a temple to house the Ark of the Covenant. David himself was precluded from building the First Temple in honor of God because, as God had said to him, he had been a fighting man and had killed others in violation of the Law. God selected Solomon to be David’s successor as the King of Israel and as the builder of the First Temple. David had planned every step and every detail of the First Temple and handed over the design drawings to Solomon with the advice to “be steadfast and resolute . . . for the Lord God, . . . will be with you. . . until you have finished all the work needed for the service of the house of the Lord.” [In the weeks before Easter this year, the Israeli Antiquities Authority that it had unearthed a colonnade that it believes is from the First Temple near the historic Temple Mount.]

This year’s stewardship theme is one sentence from King David’s prayer of thanksgiving during the last gathering of leaders in Jerusalem before his death as he announced Solomon as his successor and as he acknowledged the generosity of the Israelites and their willingness to give generously.
He prayed:

"Blessed may you be, O LORD, God of Israel our father, from eternity to eternity.

"Yours, O LORD, are grandeur and power, majesty, splendor, and glory. For all in heaven and on earth is yours; yours, O LORD, is the sovereignty; you are exalted as head over all.

"Riches and honor are from you, and you have dominion over all. In your hand are power and might; it is yours to give grandeur and strength to all.

Therefore, our God, we give you thanks and we praise the majesty of your name."

"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should have the means to contribute so freely? **For everything is from you, and we only give you what we have received from you.**

For we stand before you as aliens: we are only your guests, like all our fathers. Our life on earth is like a shadow that does not abide.

O LORD our God, all this wealth that we have brought together to build you a house in honor of your holy name comes from you and is entirely yours.

I know, O my God, that you put hearts to the test and that you take pleasure in uprightness. With a sincere heart I have willingly given all these things, and now with joy I have seen your people here present also giving to you generously."

(1 Chronicles 29:10-17, New American Bible)

King David’s final prayer is one of thanksgiving for not only for God’s gifts but for his people’s gifts to God. The wealth and generosity of
the gifts made for the building of the First Temple was overwhelming and “the people rejoiced at this willing response, because in the loyalty of their hearts, they had given willingly to the Lord.” (1 Chronicles 29:9, New English Bible)

I am asking you today to continue to give willingly out of the loyalty of your hearts – not only of your treasure as did the Israelites, but of your talents as did the craftsmen and of your time as we worship together. That umbrella of loyalty, love and generosity has sheltered us through some very rough times in the history of this Parish and we will continue to be bound together as a community through God’s grace, even through some stormy days ahead. Let’s not forget the umbrella in the trunk, only to pull it out when the next downpour occurs, but let’s return that umbrella by celebrating and honoring God’s presence in all of our lives by being faithful stewards of all He has given to us and by giving willingly to St. Matthews of our time, talent and treasure.

All things come of thee, O God, and of thine own have we given thee. Amen.

Lynne Brickner, Senior Warden
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