

Sunday, November 10, 2019  
Rev. Jessica Paulsen  
FPC, Corning  
James 4:13-17  
1 Peter 4:7-11

## Stewardship

Monday morning. Beginning of the day. Get into the office, or school, or pull out the calendar to plan for the week. Alright, we got this! Meeting this afternoon, exercise Tuesday morning, choir Wednesday night, we'll fit in our visits to family on Wednesday, go out on Thursday, and reach the weekend. Or something like that. However, it might look like for you or for me, we often begin our weeks (or even our days) by making a plan—laying out what is going to get done and when it will get done. And that's all well and fine. It works out perfectly, until Tuesday morning, when we get the email that says the portion of the project we've been waiting for, isn't going to be done on time. Or the phone rings and we hear that a family member is in the hospital or one of the kids needs picked up at school because they're sick. Or any other of variety of things and reasons that can disrupt our perfectly laid plans.

It is exactly this type of perfect planning that James is warning us against in our passage this morning. He writes, "you who say, 'today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.' Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring" (4:13, NRSV). We don't know that we'll be able to spend a year in one place and make money. We don't know what tomorrow will bring; what we may end up facing. Nothing is guaranteed.

So, then what are we supposed to do? Not plan? Float through life with no plans, doing whatever sounds good, or feels good, or seems right? Sure, that will work out really well.

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Except, there's a middle ground—between planning everything perfectly, believing we can know what will happen, and planning nothing. We can plan with the assumption that our plans will be disrupted. We can plan knowing that the week to come is probably not going to end up looking as we originally planned it. We can plan expecting things not to go as planned. We can plan knowing that no matter what ends up happening God is with us and so it's okay if the plan changes. We can stop treating disruption and change as the exception and begin treating disruption as the rule.

Adam Borneman, Presbyterian pastor and program director for Macedonian Ministry, explains it this way:

While life experience overwhelmingly indicates that attaining perfect stasis and equilibrium is a myth, we continue – often unconsciously – to relentlessly pursue such conditions. On the other hand, we know full well that disruption and disequilibrium are constant and unavoidable, and yet we do not build capacity to encounter, navigate, and utilize them faithfully. It reminds me of what my colleague Mark Ramsey has said, that we tend to mistakenly think we are crossing over a bridge of transition in order to soon re-establish stability on the other side. We most certainly are not. Let's dismiss the myth of stasis and equilibrium, and experience disruption as God's gift that nurtures freedom, creativity, imagination, and faithfulness. ("This is Why You Don't Like Disruption," published October 29, 2019, <https://macedonianministry.org/this-is-why-you-dont-like-disruption/>, accessed November 4, 2019)

Let's experience disruption as God's gift that nurtures freedom, creativity, imagination, and faithfulness. Think about that for a moment. Disruption as God's gift.

Because at the end of the day, we don't know what is going to happen. As James points out, what we "ought to say [is], 'If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.'" (4:15, NRSV). And this applies not only to our individual lives but to our communal life as well—to our life as a community of faith, and this is now I bring James and 1 Peter together with stewardship, so for those of you wondering how in the world we might get to talking about stewardship after talking about disruptions as the rule, here we go.

When we talk about stewardship, often what we say is, "I want to see your plan." "I want to see what this is going to look like." "What results will we see?" "Will the church become as it used to be?" "Will our building be full again?" and then we use the answers to those questions to decide whether or not we're going to give of our time, energy, talent, and money. If we like the answers, we might give more. If there doesn't seem to be much progress—if there's too many disruptions to what we think of as the plan, we might give less or stop giving.

And yet, as 1 Peter reminds us, "we are to maintain constant love for one another" (4:8, NRSV) and what we know as disciples of Christ is that loving each other, being a community of faith, means that we give to each other and to the community our time, energy, talent, and money. Which means that we are to give based upon what God is calling us to do, not based upon the results we hope to see—because we don't know if we'll ever actually see those results. Which is scary, because it's uncertain. It takes courage. It takes faith. It takes trust. Which are all things God has given and assured us we have.

One of that ways this community's leadership is beginning to lean into this faith and trust and courage is in our stewardship process. We've switched things around a little bit and have already begun developing the budget—before we send out information requesting your pledges. We want to put before you what we believe God is calling this community of faith to do and be,

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and to show the resources we believe we will need to accomplish those things. In order to more fully see this, we're also going to present the budget in multiple ways, a line-item budget, yes, but also what's called a narrative budget. We're going to explore the church's stewardship of its resources, the resources we believe will be needed in the coming year, in a narrative way, looking at how much of our financial resources will be needed to support 4 different ministry areas: worship and faith, education and learning, care and support, mission and outreach.

And so, we're going to put before you our plan, so to speak. But with a broader understanding that things may shift and change over time—that disruptions will happen and that we don't know what the next day, or week, or month, or year will bring but that our ultimate goal is to be faithful to what God is calling us to do and who God is calling us to be.

Borneman finishes out his article with different statements on what it means if disruption is assumed rather than treated as the exception and I want to share a specific one with you this morning. He writes, "If disruption is assumed, ministry will become more like the joy of navigating a river than paddling around a lake where the slightest disturbance seems out of place" ("This is Why You Don't Like Disruption," published October 29, 2019, <https://macedonianministry.org/this-is-why-you-dont-like-disruption/>, accessed November 4, 2019). We can come into the office on as many Mondays as we want and plan each week with as much detail to our schedules as we want, but it is guaranteed that our weeks will never end up looking as we had planned them. Unless we begin to plan them with the understanding that the lived-out plan will never be the same as the on-paper plan and that's okay. That's alright. In fact, that is normal. And then, as Borneman points out, we can "treat disruption as...an experience that can take us more deeply into the life of God" (*Ibid.*).

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