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All Saints Day
Genesis 1:27-31
Matthew 6: 19 – 21

Dessert First! Everything Comes from God¹

"A man lay dying in his bed. In death's agony, he suddenly smelled the aroma of his favorite chocolate chip cookies wafting up the stairs.

He gathered his remaining strength and lifted himself from the bed.

Leaning against the wall, he slowly made his way out of the bedroom, and with even greater effort forced himself down the stairs, gripping the railing with both hands.

With labored breath, he leaned against the door frame, gazing into the kitchen.

Were it not for death's agony, he would have thought himself already in heaven: there, spread out upon newspapers on the kitchen table were literally hundreds of his favorite chocolate chip cookies.

Was it heaven? Or was it one final act of heroic love from his devoted wife, seeing to it that he left this world a happy man?

Mustering one great final effort, he threw himself toward the table, landing on his knees in a rumpled posture.

His parched lips parted; the wondrous taste of the cookie was already in his mouth, seemingly bringing him back to life. His weakened hand shakingly made its way to a cookie at the edge of the table, when ---- it was suddenly smacked with a spatula by his wife—who said, "Stay out of those," she said, "they're for the funeral."²

¹ Title from the Book Cell Phones, Dessert, and Faith: A Guilt Free Look at Money and the Spiritual Life, by Steve Clapp.

² -"He Thought He'd Died and Gone to Chocolate Chip Cookie Heaven,"

Well, everyone has their priorities. And God's priority is us: Just look at the good gifts God gives us as enumerated in Genesis 1:27-31:

Fish of the sea, birds of the air, every plant yielding seed, every tree and its fruit , every beast of the earth---not to mention being created in God's image and given the good gift of intimacy, and the ability to procreate and bring forth children.

All good gifts. The book I read to the children illustrating Ecclesiastes 3: 1- 9 tells us that God also gives us the gift of time--time for every purpose under heaven.

But since God ALSO gives us the gift of free will, that means we have a choice about how we are going to use our time and the good gifts of creation.

As Christians we are called to be good and careful managers of all the gifts God has given us.

The bible calls it stewardship. Stewardship implies more than simply being a manager. Stewardship implies a spiritual insight into how we go about managing or stewarding our resources.

That implication is the acknowledgement that we are responsible for the use or abuse of those resources.

Jesus teaches us in Matthew 6: 19-21 that how we steward the resources God gives us has eternal consequences.

In Matthew's gospel the word heaven is always a stand in for the Kingdom of God. So when Jesus tells us to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven, he is telling us to make kingdom choices.

Because earthly --or non-kingdom choices, well they're not lasting; so they are of limited value in the long run--in the course of God's eternal timing.

They rust. Or wear out. Or get moth eaten. Or someone steals them from us. And perhaps most important of all--they aren't soul satisfying.

“Robert E. Lane in his new book, *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies* is a political scientist who recently retired from Yale University. In his book, he puzzles over the long-term rise of discontent and even clinical depression in prosperous liberal democracies.

His explanation: People in such countries have become less resilient in the face of everyday setbacks because they suffer "a kind of famine of warm interpersonal relations, of easy-to-reach neighbors, of encircling, inclusive memberships and of solidarity in family life."

What has caused loss of companionship? We're so busy striving for income that there isn't time for friendship. You can track visiting patterns for families over the past 25 years. Visiting has declined dramatically in the United States.

The divorce rate also goes up when people become richer, and partly it's because the very effort to become richer is a strain on the family.

In general, materialists are unhappy people.

If earning and consuming are less satisfying than finding companionship, why do we engage in them so eagerly?

We're not very good judges of what makes us happy. We live in a materialist culture that cues people to what they ought to be working for.

If it were a religious culture, it would be piety; if it were a warrior culture, it would be honor and bravery. But in a materialist culture, it's money

There's a craving in these societies, but they don't know the target of their craving. There's an unsettled feeling, a malaise, to use Jimmy Carter's word.

Life is not giving me what I want. But they don't know what that is, because leaders of society - and I don't mean just politicians, but universities and journalists, too - have not

helped them to see where the next phase of their felicity lies.”³

Christians, that's not the job of politicians, universities or journalists. It's our job. Jesus is the answer to what ails them. But if our life is just like theirs then how can we help them? How will we or they know the difference?

Do we have our own priorities straight?

Look at this big glass jar. Think of it as your daily life. (Pour in glass beads--) There are a thousand things that have to be done on a daily basis. And we are dutiful—we do them. In fact we allow them to drive us.

And then there are things that are really, really, important to us—(put in the big rocks)—but on a day to day basis, they get crowded out - we just don't seem to have room! (Take out the rocks, and empty out the glass beads.)

However, when we remember, that God puts us first and gives us all truly good things we can chose to put God in our lives first—(put in the big black rock) to anchor our lives to Kingdom values.

Then like that older lady Lucille who chose to eat dessert first—and give to God first---we too can chose to put Kingdom treasure in our lives first—those things that matter most to God and most to us: (Take out the big Chocolate Chip cookies).

For me those things are: (put a cookie in for each one):

- My relationship with Jesus
- My relationship with my husband
- My relationship with my family
- My relationship with my friends
- Sharing Jesus with others
- Caring for the needs of my neighbor
- Caring for this beautiful world

³ -D.W. Miller, "Can't Buy Me Contentment," from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, chronicle.com

- My ministry as your Spiritual Leader
- Time for refreshment and re-creation

If I put these things in first, everything else fits in nicely.... (Pour in the glass beads and put on the lid of the jar.) I even have room left for more!

What are the big things God is calling you to make a priority as stewards of the good things God gives us?

I invite you to identify changes you want to make in how to put God first in your life, in how you manage your time or in how you care for yourself, for others or your environment.

Implement those changes for the next thirty days—and lets see if we can't establish some new kingdom habits that can continue!⁴

⁴ Adapted from page. 55 of Steve Clapp's book as cited above.