

**Text of Steven Blanks’  
Stewardship Presentation to the Congregation  
Trinity Episcopal Church  
October 2011**

God Loves You

God loves you, God loves you, God loves you.

As a small boy growing up in a very small town in North Carolina, I remember church from a very young age. The preacher would be in his high pulpit extolling the power and majesty of God. I recall the message was God loved us....his people....me. My experiences of love had been demonstrated through examples of my parents and relatives. I could see it with them. It took a while longer for me to recognize the love from my three younger brothers. But best of all, I knew that God loved me.

God Has Gifted You

As I grew up in the Methodist church in North Carolina from grade one through my college years, there had been a great focus on a strong Sunday school. What I learned from my many teachers those years ago still affect my life today. Indeed, dedicated teachers are a blessing. Trinity is fortunate to have good teachers!

Over those years, I started to hear the message that God has given each of us a different set of talents and challenges. That really everything around us was a gift from God. God was everywhere.

I became aware that life was discovering what those gifts from God would be. This seemed to me to be one reason for college. During college, I found some people were brilliant, some had skills in drama, math, sports, or social gifts, or public speaking, or compelling personalities. I recall meeting my first genius in freshman chemistry class. He would score in the high 90s while the rest of my class was lucky to score in the teens. In graduate school, I started attending a Lutheran church in Amherst, Massachusetts. I was challenged with its liturgical traditions versus Methodist worship.

I became aware that some gifts need to be unhidden. Those gifts are waiting to emerge. In my past Lutheran church in Vestal, New York there was an intentional adult class called Gifts Discovery that helped with that process.

God Needs You

As my faith and understanding grew more, I understood that God had gifted his people, but now God also needs us. God wants his people to help with the building of the kingdom. God can not do it alone. In my experience, when you receive a gift, you usually have a response. I think it is part of our human nature to react to any gift. In music, there is a particular expression. The movie Lion King has a great example of “call and response” in its opening scene of the gathering animals for the presentation of the new lion cub Simba. There is this ongoing dialogue between caller and called. There is a great singing back and forth. In the movie, that opening scene music builds to engulf you and engage you. You quickly find yourself joining into song. To me, it is just like God who calls us. God who wants a response from us.

## Enlarge the Heart and Mind

Trinity Episcopal is a community of faith and truth. It is attributed to a French nobleman Alexis de Tocqueville, famous for writing a book entitled Democracy in America in early 1830s, that “you hear truth never from your enemy, rarely from your friends.” That is not the case here at Trinity.

In my view, one aspect of a vibrant Christian community is a place where you experience enlarging your heart and enlarging your mind. You might recall a popular children’s movie, Grinch Who Stole Christmas, where the grinch had a heart that was too small. What was the joy in that movie? The joy was in the change of the grinch’s heart - when his heart grew.

That happens here at Trinity. Each of us, wherever we have fit in here at Trinity, have become both beneficiaries and benefactors of changes in our own heart and mind. We influence people around us. God needs us, and Trinity needs us.

## My Journey Here at Trinity

I moved to Fishkill in 2004 having prior lived 25 years in Vestal, NY. I hate moving!

I started showing up at Trinity around late 2004 and early 2005 eventually becoming more consistent in attending our 10 AM service. IBM had already started sending me to Singapore each month. Given this much business travel, it kept my involvement to attending worship services. Yet there were several patient folks at Trinity who reached out to me.

I was asked to join the choir. We still need choir members. I enjoyed the various social events and dinners at Trinity. Recently a few people launched about a year ago First Friday gatherings, a fun group focused on both Bible study and community. Now, I am about to finish my second year on Vestry this next February. Surprisingly to me, I have even grown to appreciate singing Anglican chants. I see God working in each of our lives.

As I start to conclude this talk, please let me read a poem by Joyce Sutphen recently shared at a First Friday gathering. I think people here at Trinity do know something a little different than the ending of this poem:

Body is something you need in order to stay  
on this planet and you only get one.  
And no matter which one you get, it will not  
be satisfactory. It will not be beautiful  
enough, it will not be fast enough, it will  
not keep on for days at a time, but will  
pull you down into a sleepy swamp and  
demand apples and coffee and chocolate cake.

Body is a thing you have to carry  
from one day into the next. Always the  
same eyebrows over the same eyes in the same  
skin when you look in the mirror, and the

same creaky knee when you get up from the floor and the same wrist under the watchband. The changes you can make are small and costly – better to leave it as it is.

Body is a thing that you have to leave eventually. You know that because you have seen others do it, others who were once like you, living inside their pile of bones and flesh, smiling at you, loving you, leaning in the doorway, talking to you for hours and then one day they are gone. No forwarding address.

I think here at Trinity we do know an address.

## Numbers

Our lives sometime seem to be dominated by numbers. Our calendars are filled with various dates and time commitments. You can not avoid hearing about poll numbers of various presidential candidates. You read about the incredible amounts of money these presidential candidates are collecting from supporters and corporations. In news of the past few weeks, another set of numbers gets prominent press coverage - the 99% and 1%.

Trinity has its own numbers. Please read and understand the important budget costs for the different ministries here at Trinity. Please consider your pledge response. Please ask any Vestry member or staff any questions that you may have.

This part of the year focuses on our time and talents. Our community depends on us. There is no one else. Please pray and consider – all that is requested is a response.