

# Feasting on Gratitude

## Stewardship Reflection Series

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
and with all your soul, and with all your mind...*



**T**oo often it seems that rules and laws are what make the world go 'round. This was as true—if not more so—in Jesus day. So there is a certain comfort I take in having the Great Commandment as a core principle to help put things in right order and perspective. Still, loving God with all I've got and loving my neighbor as myself is at once simple and complex and it shows forth differently for each of us.

**A**t my parish, we have the custom of gathering in a circle around the altar to receive communion. It is a joyous moment as we move together toward the center of the sanctuary to partake in this great feast. Little children break free from parents to get close to the altar; elders make their way slowly with their walkers; young couples hold hands as they wait for the bread and wine to come their way.

**A**bout two years ago, we noticed one gentleman who quietly slipped into the sanctuary after worship began, stayed through the sermon and Nicene Creed, and the Eucharistic Prayer, and when the time came to gather to receive the bread and the wine, he would hand the deacon or acolyte an envelope filled with his offering gift and then leave. He never spoke a word. And he never put his gift in the offering plate when it came around. And he never stayed to receive communion. In other words, he didn't follow the "rules". This went on for about a year and a half. I learned the man's name was Jason, and I'd see him around the neighborhood doing things that no one else seemed to care about doing—like picking up trash on the sidewalk; opening doors for people as they entered shops and office buildings. Jason didn't have a paying job. His "job" seemed to be caring for his neighbors and his neighborhood.

**O**ne day about six months ago, Jason put his offering envelope in the plate on the altar and stayed for communion. Our Great Thanksgiving was palpably different that day. Jason is a man of few words and his developmental difficulties mean we may never know why he does what he does but we continue to learn from him just the same. We don't understand why he delayed receiving communion or if his receiving the sacrament was in any way linked to his giving. But there was something about his desire to give and care for others before receiving for himself that touched our community.

**J**ason reminded us of what it means to practice proportional giving in our stewardship. No matter what our employment situation, or income, or station in life, faithful stewardship is about remembering and loving God first and loving our neighbors as ourselves. As a community, we seek to work toward and beyond the tithe in all we do and Jason reminded us of what "first fruits" living is all about. There are plenty of "rules" about giving and supporting the work of the church but what happens when the first rule—the only rule—is simply showing up and giving to and loving others without expectation of reciprocity? How are

we changed when that Christ-like way of living is shown in our very midst? It might be as the hymn goes, "If our love were but more faithful, we should take him at his word; and our life would be thanksgiving for the goodness of the Lord."



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### Reflection Questions

1. How is the Great Commandment expressed in your life? In your community?
2. How do you experience giving as worship?