

GOD



THE GIVER

Stewardship Narrative Series presented by TENS

Proper 24
Mark 10:35-45

Abraham cast Hagar and her baby into the desert with nothing but some bread and water. When those ran out, Hagar left Ishmael alone because she could not bear to watch him die. When baby Ishmael lost everything—parents, sustenance, shelter—he had nothing—but the God that saved him.

Ishmael's polar opposite is Willy Loman in "The Death Of A Salesman." Thomas Dumm describes Willy as lonely, alienated, and trapped in the struggle to succeed by having. But the life of having is empty. "Getting and spending we lay waste our powers. Little we see in nature that is ours." (Wordsworth)

Psychoanalyst Eric Fromm said that Western culture had promised us happiness through possessions, but that a life of getting, spending, and clutching had failed to deliver. It cuts us off from ourselves and reduces us to jumping through economic hoops. But we can live happily through participation in the dance of humanity. Fromm calls that "being." We develop the capacity for being through letting go of possessions and connecting with each other.

Gabriel Marcel says the problem is treating the world as something we can watch, dominate, possess, manipulate. He calls that "having." We can "have" our families as much as our homes. We stand one step removed from everything; using instead of celebrating.

Real life happens when we give ourselves away. It's as vulnerable as baby Ishmael because it is engaged with others, participating rather than controlling. It's surfing.

Jesus' disciples left everything to follow him. Eventually, they asked, "Now what will we get in return?" Jesus said, "Whoever finds his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it." The word translated as "life" is psyche. It means our core identity.

Communion is about plunging into a spontaneous flowing state of appreciation and gratitude. We place our gifts on God's altar to represent all we have and all we are. Our gifts are blessed, broken, and shared with one another. It is the exchange of



having for being. We give ourselves to God and open our hearts to life.

Meister Eckhart said, "The person who is full of things is empty of God; but the person who is empty of things is full of God." He also said, "No one ever gave so much of himself away that he did not have more to give."

Reflection Questions:

How does "having" mark the habits and values of your life?

How do you practice "being" in the world rather than having?

How has God opened your heart?



The Rt. Rev. Dan Edwards is the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Nevada.

