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The gifts of faith

BY THE REV. MATTHEW WOODWARD



The parable of the wise and foolish virgins brings back so many rector wedding memories. I have to say, virgins trimming wicks are few and far between in early 21st century Bay Area weddings; you are more likely to find mason jars

liberally strewn around the barn venue and handwritten chalkboards offering tri-tip, which you can eat perched on a bale of hay. But the frenetic last-minute energy of things needing to be fixed is just the same today as in scripture.

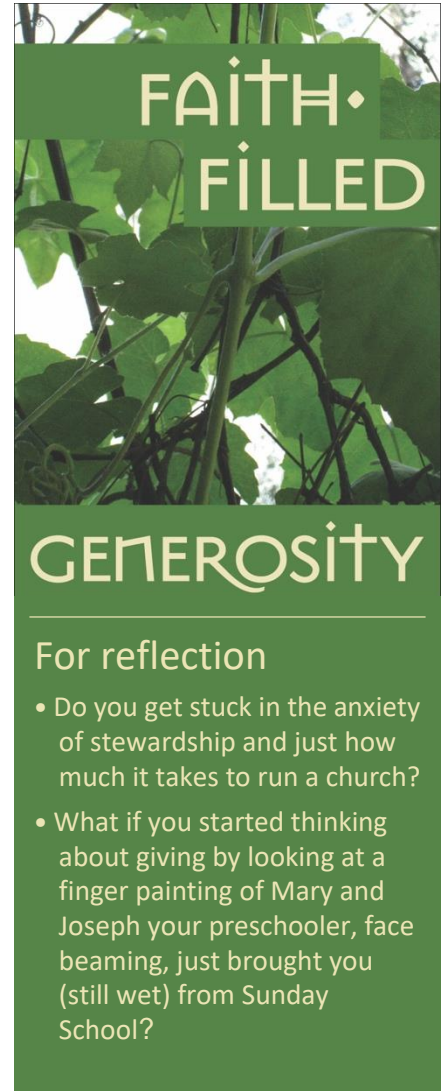
If you get stuck in the anxiety, keeping company with the wedding planner and their staff, you are going to miss the point of the event.

Weddings confer the blessing of companionship. We can get stuck in the mechanics of delivery and all of the anxiety it generates. Or we can acknowledge that love is a great gift, and we should be grateful for it.

I once oversaw a wedding in which the couple forgot to get a license. I took a deep breath, made sure they had a wonderful day, and secretly remarried them a month or two later. Their love for each other was a gift. We found a way to fix the paperwork.

Faith is a gift, Christian community is a gift; worship, children's choirs and that moment when teenagers suddenly make a profound connection with their faith: These are all gifts. We could get caught up in the anxiety of paying for it all, or we could just say thank you and write the pledge that shows how grateful we are for all we have received.

The Rev. Matthew Woodward is an Englishman on the West Coast of America and the Rector of Transfiguration Episcopal Church in San Mateo California. He is a recent puppy parent, and loves comics. He has also found stewardship ministry to be a real joy, rather than the other thing, in recent years.



- Do you get stuck in the anxiety of stewardship and just how much it takes to run a church?
- What if you started thinking about giving by looking at a finger painting of Mary and Joseph your preschooler, face beaming, just brought you (still wet) from Sunday School?