

“Imagine the Possibilities: Our Church”
Mary Kay Collins | November 12, 2006 | 1 Chronicles 29:1-12

1 Chronicles 29:1-12:

King David said to the whole assembly, “My son Solomon, whom alone God has chosen, is young and inexperienced, and the work is great; for the temple will not be for mortals but for the Lord God. So I have provided for the house of my God, so far as I was able, the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver, and the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, and wood for the things of wood, besides great quantities of onyx and stones for setting, antimony, colored stones, all sorts of precious stones, and marble in abundance. Moreover, in addition to all that I have provided for the holy house, I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it to the house of my God: three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, for overlaying the walls of the house, and for all the work to be done by artisans, gold for the things of gold and silver for the things of silver. Who then will offer willingly, consecrating themselves today to the Lord?” Then the leaders of ancestral houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, and the officers over the king’s work. They gave for the service of the house of God five thousand talents and ten thousand darics of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of bronze, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. Whoever had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the Lord, into the care of Jehiel the Gershonite. Then the people rejoiced because these had given willingly, for with single mind they had offered freely to the Lord; King David also rejoiced greatly.

Then David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly; David said: “Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our ancestor Israel, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all.

This is the third week in our “Imagine the Possibilities” campaign. Over these weeks we have looked at our own personal lives, our relationships with God and others, and today the church.

What is significant about the church? I have heard people say, I don’t have to belong to a church, or worship in a church on Sundays, to be a Christian. Often this sentiment comes from someone who is fed up with the institution of the church, disappointed in the problems that it has, accusing the church of being full of hypocrites, things like this. I know people who have opted out of the body of the church, for periods of time, because the church wasn’t as “happy” as they needed it to be, or they were hurt by happenings in the church. I will be the first to admit that I do love a happy church and I would say that right now, even in this continual time of transition, FPCM is a happy church. The spirit in the air and the energy in the church are great right now. I believe this is so because we are making a very intentional effort to be on this spiritual journey together, seeking God’s will and imagining the possibilities of what else the Lord will do through this church.

And yet, this church and all churches go through times of challenge and pain. We have in the past, and we will again. The church is made up of God's people and it is here that we live out our lives, and we go through the seasons of life together as a body. Read the book of Acts in the New Testament and you will see that even the very first church had great challenges. The church is not a building—it is the people! This building we sit in is the place where we the church gather to worship. We the people are what make up the church, and for so many different reasons we have gathered here as the church. We have become family to one another; we have lived our lives, the joys and celebrations, the pain and hurt together as a body.

If we did not have these walls, we still would be the church, people seeking to follow Christ, to come together and worship God and be led by the Holy Spirit.

In the Scripture read today from 1st Chronicles, we read about the building of a temple by the people of God. These people are a gathered group of believers and King David, after making his offering to the Lord, a very generous offering, invites others to join him and make their offering. He says to them (vs. 5) “Who then will offer willingly, consecrating themselves today to the Lord?” Each of them begins to make very generous offerings.

Now when David calls them out he isn't doing this because it will serve him, David. Nor does God need anything from humans. David asks them who will consecrate themselves, which means set themselves apart for the Lord, because he knows that in giving thanks and praise to God, worshipping God with our whole selves, will be such a gift to all these people. David gives them an opportunity to be richly blessed by making a sacrifice, surrendering their heart to the Lord, and they respond. David ends with a prayer of thanksgiving, not thanking the people, but thanking God for his faithfulness.

Next week you will be asked to come forward, walk down this aisle, and place your commitment card into a basket. You are being invited to consecrate, or set yourself apart, for the Lord. What happens next is that in this sacrifice and surrendering of your heart you will be partnering with God in ushering in the Kingdom of God. You will make an investment into the most important business in the world.

Nothing compares to the work of the church. Did you realize that? The work that happens through the church is the most important work in the world. The church is the headquarters where the work of God is to be done. The church is the body of Christ. That's why when you give to the church, it's a very different experience from giving to a charitable institution. You may get the same tax write-off, but giving to your church is a tangible and essential way of worshipping God.

In the Good Morning page of your bulletins this morning, which I encourage you to read, I've written a little about the story in Mark of the poor widow who gave two copper coins, worth one penny, to the church. Jesus says that this widow has given more than all the rich people putting in large sums of money. She gives herself—she is consecrated, set apart, worshipping God. It's not about fundraising—the widow is not giving her penny because it's going to make dent in the church's budget. She is giving in worship.

That is what we are all called to do. The great challenge we have is that while we might know this about the church, and we might even recognize our responsibility as Christians to invest in God's work, we are competing against the voice of the world, a machine that screams daily, Give to me! The world says I am worth it, buy, borrow, trade, get all of me that you can. And from the inside we hear, you owe it to yourself, go ahead and indulge. The struggle can be fierce, and under the influence of the world's message, at times our giving reflects the world's values, not God's.

How do we silence that voice, or at least drown out that voice and listen for God's voice? With a lot of prayer, Scripture reading, gathering together, and living in community. We need to remember the stories of the family of faith, how it is that lives are truly turned around, changed because of God's love and the work of His church. Imagining how many more lives will be touched because of the work of the church and our participation as followers of Christ. This is the greatest investment that we will ever make. I promise, but much more importantly, God promises.

Think of the video we watched at the beginning of the service today. We saw just a glimpse of some of the recent ministries of this church—all outside of this sanctuary. I would ask you this week, as you prepare to make your commitments, to set a few minutes aside to truly imagine the possibilities of this church. You may be getting a little tired by now of our slogan—I know I am—but seriously, think and pray about what this body could be like 2... 5... 10... 20... years from now, and how many lives could be touched. That is a legacy. We used a song called "Legacy" in this morning's video. Listen to some of its words again:

*I want to leave a legacy
How will they remember me?
Did I choose to love? Did I point to You, [God], enough
To make a mark on things?
I want to leave an offering
A child of mercy and grace who
blessed your name unapologetically
And leave that kind of legacy.*

Let's all prepare to leave that kind of legacy, to consecrate ourselves in worship and love for our God.

Let us pray.