

My name is Elizabeth Kallop and for those of you who do not know me, I first came to Westminster Presbyterian Church at the very tender age of 2. From Sunday school, Youth group, Vacation Bible School and Missions trips to singing with the choir, ringing hand bells, Crop Walks and a few spaghetti night dinners interspersed between those activities, I have been shepherded, mentored, encouraged, challenged, and loved, every minute of the past 24 years I have spent here. Most especially, I have learned (through the amazing work of the people in this church body) the value of serving, serving others and serving God.

And, for those of you who do know me, what a journey we have shared so far! Praise the Lord!

My Mom called me about six weeks ago and mentioned that the Stewardship Committee was inviting home grown proof to speak of the great and lasting benefits gained through growing up in this church body. The purpose of said invitations was not only to inspire and edify the community, but to also encourage and challenge all of us to really be participants in God’s work; His work in our homes, our church family, our community and to the corners of the earth. Needless to say, as my mom, was explaining these goals, I knew I couldn’t be silent. Surprise, surprise, huh?

Kidding aside, I am absolutely delighted and humbled at the invitation to speak to you this morning about the importance and great benefits one gains through being an active member of the church family here at Westminster. Moreover, I pray that my words might indeed motivate you to think and pray about how you too, can and should give of yourselves, your time, your gifts, and your finances to be an active part of this body. After all, all that we have is from God and it is right for us to give back to Him, honoring Him, Praising Him.

So let’s start with the basics shall we? I am a bit embarrassed to admit that I didn’t know the exact definition on paper of “stewardship” 6 weeks and a few days ago. In looking it up, I read that “Stewardship” is “The conducting, supervising, or managing of something; especially: the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care.” Synonyms include “Care”, “Direction”, “Guidance” “Management” and “Supervision.”

While I had not known this definition on paper, I realized I definitely knew what “stewardship” looked like—I knew its care and direction through the tireless efforts of the Sunday school staff, all volunteers. I understood its guidance through the sermons of Reverend Johnston, Martha, Skip and now Pastor Joe. And finally, its management and supervision, exemplified by the elders and deacons and of course the various committee members of which there are too many to name. Ah, we Presbyterians and our committees. Simply, as a member of this congregation, I had seen and experienced stewardship, and grown as a result of it, having myself become a steward.

This morning I'd like for us to look at three questions—

- 1. *What does it mean to be a steward?***
- 2. *Why is it so important that we are stewards?***
- 3. *And finally, how can we be stewards?***

Since graduating from college, I have divided my time between working in New York City as an event planner and volunteering in Tanzania. (More on Tanzania later!) Among the events I plan through work is an annual black tie gala. If you'll allow me a minute, well actually two minutes, I'd like to tell you a little bit more about the gala which benefits DKMS, a leukemia charity that is actually the largest bone marrow donor bank in the entire world. Well, each July we begin planning the big event, which is always the last Thursday of April. If you were to come close to me, you might still see the bags under my eyes from the lack of sleep I experienced all of April in preparing for the big night just 10 days ago. Anyway for nine months, we toil over selling tickets and tables, sending the invitations, and looking for a musical guest, among other tasks, knowing that all of the hard work must be seen in one 4-hour period, on just one night.

As much as I would love for you to believe that I just snap my fingers and voila! everything falls into place, there are so many components to the evening and various teams working together to make the event as seamless as possible. From picking floral arrangements, staff trainings, deciding on what music should play as people walk up to stage (you'd be surprised HOW important this is), to coordinating travel to the gala for such guests as Rihanna (one of the honorees this year) and Mary J Blige (the musical guest), for if they don't arrive, well you know how that story would end...then we have the registration staff who help to make sure we do have not party crashers, the wait staff serving the guests food, stage crew, lighting crew, etc. I'm sure you get the point. Clearly, no one part is more important than the other—rather each part has a specific responsibility to make the night a smashing hit!

We just heard Paul's words to the Corinthians about unity in the body. How ears and eyes and feet are each incredibly vital all their own. Let's jump back just a minute as a reminder: Verses 17-19 read "If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body."

How laden with truth are Paul's words. Each of us, each member of this church body, is just as important as the other. Look to your right or left right now. You're looking into the face of one of God's children, a hand, a foot, an eye or ear, what have you. An active member, a contributing member to the body of Christ. Without even one, the lack of fullness, of completeness, would be evident.

When you arrived this morning to service, I'm sure you didn't just walk right in and sit down. Rather, you were most likely greeted by someone at the door, with a handshake or welcoming embrace, perhaps you dropped off a child in the nursery or in Sunday school class, you were given a bulletin, *and for you moms, you received a delicate flower*. All the while, the prelude echoed throughout the sanctuary, as you prepared your heart for worship service. During service you'll hear/you have heard the latest about the missions projects in which members of this body participate, and then perhaps once we've received the benediction, you'll spend some special moments at coffee hour. On any given Sunday, my guess is you experience at least a few of these, right? Well friends, you've seen the body of Christ at work and I bet you've participated a time or two.

As a child, I distinctly remember spending time on the little playground outside honoring Rita Bair and her dedication to the children here, a gift from a grateful parent.

Many times I'm sure we've all regarded the beautiful stained glass windows that decorate this sanctuary up front here, in the back and on the sides, each pane stuck together with love.

Or perhaps the flowers and garden planted several years ago by the Kelly Kealy.

More recently, the drive up to the church was made a little bit smoother through the generosity of those who gave to the parking lot fund.

Also, I recall John Pillarella standing up and joyfully announcing that he and his family were donating to the church a new, illuminated sign. Each subsequent time I've driven along Tindall Road, I've been reminded of this generous gift to our church family. Today is no different of course.

Friends, being a steward, being responsible with that, which has been entrusted to us, is at the very core of our being, really at the very core of every Christian's life. Oswald Chambers, the man who penned MY UTMOST FOR HIS HIGHEST, a great daily devotional, wrote,

We must never measure our spiritual capacity on the basis of our education or our intellect; our capacity in spiritual things is measured on the basis of the promises of God...When it is a question of God's Almighty Spirit, never say, "I can't." Never allow the limitation of your own natural ability to enter into the matter. If we have received the Holy Spirit, God expects the work of the Holy Spirit to be exhibited in us.

To act justly and to love mercy and to **walk humbly** with God is that which He commands us to do. It is a privilege for us to be called "His Children," and even when we're not precisely sure HOW God will use us, He never ceases to amaze us! Paul told this very thing to the Ephesians in chapter 3: Simply, God will do more than one can ask or imagine.

When applying to colleges a few years back, unlike many of my classmates who applied to at least 10 schools, I applied to just one. Were Mom and Dad ecstatic about that! NYU was the only place I wanted to be and the only school I really felt called to attend. And, the most expensive university in the country at the time. Again, Mom and Dad were sooo happy. Anyway, it might sound bizarre that I applied to just one school, crazy even, because, well, it is crazy. It makes no sense that I would apply to just one school. However, that's how faith is, no? When it comes to faith, practicality just doesn't work.

On a similar note, in July of 2007, shortly after I graduated college (by the way, was accepted to NYU, Praise the Lord!) and felt somewhat like an adult who could make good decisions I surprised my parents with the very exciting news that I would climb Mount Kilimanjaro, Tanzania's beloved mountain and Africa's highest peak, in February 2008 as part of an extreme fundraiser for the American Cancer Society.

While my parents had come to expect some “out in left field” ideas and aspirations from their second born, what would stem from this mountain climb would and has certainly topped everything else.

I'd always wanted to go to Africa to work with children, orphans, specifically those who had AIDS, and initially announced this to my mom while still a teenager. Having been nurtured in this church family for so long, I learned that one does not “merely listen to the word, “ but “does what is says.” So, when just hours before leaving Tanzania in March 2008, my group and I visited Shalom Orphanage Centre, there was a resounding echo, similar to that of Handel's MESSIAH. I'm sure you're all familiar with the HALLELUJAH Chorus!

I of course did not know how God would orchestrate my working with the children at Shalom Orphanage, for truly, when does anyone really know when or how God will make His will happen. One thing is for certain: I prayed and tried to be quiet and still enough to listen. I felt like Samuel and Isaiah answering “HERE I AM LORD, SEND ME!” with excitement similar to a small child on Christmas morning, just waiting to open presents!

While still uncertain of the path upon which I would tread, I sent out prayer letters, handwritten notes, emails and made phone calls, asking family and friends to partner with me in this exciting journey. Many of you have joined me indeed, in turn writing such sweet words of encouragement, with a check here and there, and especially praying and interceding on my behalf. Words could never express my deep thanks for your love.

Well, three years and four return trips to Tanzania later, sixteen children from Shalom Orphanage Centre are now enrolled in a sponsorship program I created as a result of that brief afternoon visit in 2008, as a result of God's calling. Each Autumn I spend about four months living in Tanzania developing this vital program, which sends the children to a local English school. Each day, as I'm in the throes of playing Mama Eliza to sixteen children, from buying their school books to helping them write letters to their sponsors, Jesus reminds me of the great joy experienced through serving Him. And even in the midst of frustration and

impatience, for the pace of life is certainly slower in the rural town of Karatu than the concrete jungle that is New York City, I have never experienced such complete and utter joy.

The foundation of faith and obedience, which was laid through the tireless efforts of this church family, prepared me for the incredible journeys I've had thus far in my life.

Now parents, I am not saying that your child or children too will up and move to Africa or another corner of the earth as a result of the nurturing and teachings received here at Westminster Presbyterian. Though if it's God's will, Amen! Truly, each journey is one of following Jesus—following Him to wherever it is He calls—hearing Him and listening and of course, being willing to go.

Ok, if you're still hesitant, thinking, "Well, I only can tithe so much or I can only give x amount of time," I have a secret for you: it's not the amount of your dollars or time, though please do be generous, which pleases God. What pleases and honors our God is our heart, our willingness to sacrifice.

I'm sure you recall the widow's offering of just a few cents, found in Mark 12:41-44:

⁴¹ Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

⁴³ Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴ They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

Another example is the story of Mary and Martha. Martha was always, go go go, I need to serve. Whereas it was Mary who sat at Jesus' feet and truly knew Him.

And, do I even need to mention Abraham, my goodness, and his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, his own son on the altar? I mean, now here is a man who can teach us all a little about sacrifices and obedience and honoring God. What faith. Chambers writes:

"The great lesson to be learned from Abraham's faith in God is that he was prepared to do anything for God. He was there to obey God, no matter what contrary belief of his might be violated by his obedience."

There are so many opportunities to become involved in God's work both within these sanctuary walls and beyond. Everyone is gifted differently—some are better at managing finances and long-term budgeting while others may be great at encouraging people, teaching and motivating. None of these is nobler than another. For a body needs all functioning parts to be complete...From serving as a deacon, elder, or perhaps the worship assistant to hosting coffee hour or providing items to stock the food pantry.

Take my brother and me for example. Jahred is incredibly intelligent; so much so that is sorta scares me! He does private equity, which I really could not begin to explain to you, and is 100% great at it. Loves it. On the contrary, I wouldn't think of stepping foot into a private equity firm unless by accident. Rather my passions lie with working with/for children. Different as we are, God uses our gifts to edify others.

How many times have we heard Tamy Peyton share a Minute for Mission? Countless times! Whether she shares an exciting update about the mission committee's work or invites us to donate our time or monies to those in need. Do you feel called to serve God's people in various corners of the earth, talk to Tamy!

Week after week we hear the choir, youth or adult, sometimes hand-bells or guests performers. For more than 2 decades my mom taught the Youth Choir. I've seen the amazing guidance she's provided not only for myself, but for numerous students under her care—some of whom are sitting here this morning. Are you especially gifted with music, talk to Ralph! Share your gift with this church body and contribute to worship.

And what about the teachers and those involved with Christian Education? Another generation of Bair women—see Julie Bair. We all know how hard these individuals work week after week to ensure that the youngest minds and hearts in our family are fed and nourished and taught the importance of living for God. Imagine if these incredible people didn't listen to God's call to serve...what a loss we would all experience.

On a similar note, especially for parents, an easy way to teach your children the importance of tithing—of giving back to God what He has given us—is to get your children offering envelopes. I remember after both my brother and I were confirmed and thus members of this church, my mom made certain that each of us had an offering envelope. In doing this, we were taught the importance of being an active member—a tithing member—of this church body.

Back to lessons for our youth, this past September, as I walked to the post office in Karatu, I was elated to have received a piece of mail. As my rafiki (friend) behind the counter handed me the envelope, I noticed the familiar return address of Tindall Road. I could hardly wait to return home and tear open the package. As I did, I was speechless—that's right folks!—speechless, at the letters and photos from the youth group kids. I immediately penned a response with some photos of life in Tanzania and made sure to answer each of the students' curious questions. I still have the letters and photos. My deepest thanks to Mrs. Buhl and the others involved in such a special package. How thoughtful.

Having received that package got me thinking of the many times I had received little reminders of God's love and gifts. During my freshman year of college, I remember receiving a shoebox full of home made cookies and notes from the women who so lovingly pored

over the baked goods. Though I was trying to my best to avoid gaining the “freshman 15”, I knew the love with which this parcel had been prepared.

In closing, I’ll share one last wise tidbit from our friend Ozzie Chambers:

“Faith is not some weak and pitiful emotion, but is strong and vigorous confidence built on the fact that God is holy love. Faith is the supreme effort of your life—throwing yourself with abandon and total confidence upon God.”

So, family, I encourage you to pray about immersing yourself in this church body—keep in mind the question is not “Why should I?” but “How can I?”