

15 OCTOBER 2017

‘What are you going to do with this?’

THE REV. EDWARD GOMEZ

Many years ago, when I was studying for the priesthood, we were called to help on Sundays at some of the local parishes. That semester I was called to serve at St. Thomas More Church. New to the area, I was unaware that this church was one of the most affluent churches in the diocese. I entered the sacristy that Sunday and met the rector. He turned to me impeccably dressed in a black suit and with an extended hand and a broad welcoming smile, introduced himself saying, “Hi! Welcome to our church!” Then, almost immediately, from behind came another priest who did not fit the dress code of this marble-laden English castle, who gave me a surprising I’ve known you all my life embrace! I smiled — actually laughed — and said, Hi! He was a missionary in Africa and the guest preacher that day.

His sermon was moving as he shared his experience with the poor. I felt like I got hit in the chest with God asking me, “So what are you going to do with this?” The collection that day was for the missions. After the service I was invited to lunch with the rector, the missionary preacher and other guests of the rector. During lunch, a man entered handed a small envelope to the rector saying, “What shall I do with this?” The envelope contained a set of earrings and a note saying, “Take these and have them appraised, and whatever that amount is, I will sell them and give the money to the missions.”

We were all taken aback by this act of giving. But it was not until almost a month later that we learned

the earrings were valued at \$175,000!

In our reading from Exodus this Sunday we hear that Aaron said to them, “Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” Of course, where they gathered them to make a golden idol, the woman at St. Thomas More ripped hers off in a spontaneous act of compassion when she realized the needs of the poor. But I also suspect that she took them off because she could no longer bear the weight of them.

When you encounter God’s call, the almost

For reflection...

- Was there a time you or someone you know was moved to respond to a need with greater generosity than you thought possible?
- How do stories of such generosity touch you?

immediate reaction is to let go of everything you thought important so that you can be free to love. Giving generously becomes easy because at some level you realize that what you have is not yours — but God’s. And if wealth or privilege has been entrusted to you, then you know — with certainty — that you must share it.

I don’t know who this woman was, or her life circumstances. I just know that when she ripped off those earrings, she responded to God’s question, “So now what are you going to do with this?” She acted and gave far more than expensive earrings; she gave of herself honestly, freely and out of pure love.



Edward Gomez is Vicar of St. Paul’s/San Pablo Episcopal Church in Houston. His ministry has led him from the Lancandonan jungle of Mexico to the Peruvian province of Madre de Dios as a missionary, to the nonprofit world, where he has served in various leadership roles, including as the Executive Director of El Buen Samaritano Episcopal Mission in Austin. He is married to Denise Trevino-Gomez; they have three children and one adorable granddaughter.

JOURNEY TO GENEROSITY



Sunday, October 15, 2017
Witness by Liz Krueger

Good morning, everyone. I'm Liz Krueger and it is my honor to speak to you about stewardship today.

I was born into a church-going family that had attended a Lutheran church for years, but when I was about three years old, we moved into a new town and began attending the Episcopal Church. I was too little to know for sure, but I'm guessing that for my mom, the church was her only satisfactory social connection within her new community. Without it, we would have been a lonely duo while my sisters went to school and my dad went to work. My earliest friends went to that church. The kids were like cousins, their parents – aunts and uncles (Mainland style, so I never called them that, but still...)

We practically lived at that church. Church and Sunday school, youth group, adult formation classes, catechumenate, pot lucks, lessons and carols. We never went anywhere for spring break because it was always Holy Week and we needed to be at church. I didn't even check the acolyte schedule, I usually just robed up early so I could get my fave cassock.

When I went off to college, it was instinct to look for a church. That was where one found community, family. Even as an exchange student in Japan, I found church families. Joe and I married young, and went to his college's Lutheran student chapel. We moved on from there to find several church homes. In our 17 years of marriage, we moved 12 times and attended 8 different churches in 5 cities.

Much of that time we were transient – students or new parents – there for a summer or a semester. Pledging wasn't something we did most years. Transitioning to real adults has been an interesting process, though. I now see that even hooking up toilets to the municipal sewer is not a miracle of the angels. Maintaining even the roof over our heads is expensive. I now see that those nightly activities that filled my childhood didn't come easily or for free. Those nights were made of extra effort from people who believed coming together in Jesus' name was vital and important for their souls. From my parents' perspective, church was the first place to support.

When we moved to Kailua, we did what we always do: We checked out the closest Episcopal Church first. We liked Emmanuel immediately. It helped that we already knew and liked Reverend Matthew and there were several kids carving ipu in the garden. Within a matter of months, my husband, Joe, was voted onto the Bishop's Committee, our children, Isaiah and Josie, were alternately acolyting and attending Godly Play, and we had attended several weeknight classes.

Joe, the kids, and I need the weekly revitalization we get at this church. We need a place to meet like-minded, Christ-centered individuals and families. We need to sing together, to pray together, to laugh and cry together, because if it wasn't for this place, we wouldn't know our best friends, our aunts and uncles. Since the plot of land on which we meet, the roof over our heads, and the chairs on which we sit, not to mention the ministries we support, are not free, I must financially support this place.

We love to break bread with you all every Sunday and we thank God for you. Since we want it to continue, it is up to each of us as individuals to ensure this continues to be an oasis in our busy, often stressful lives. That is why we pledged last year (for 2017) and will pledge again this year for our 2018 planned contribution. In so doing, we can have a front row seat to Emmanuel's continued growth, prosperity, and God's great love. And we invite you to join us. *Amen.*