

## **Stewardship talk, Oct. 16, 2011**

Many of you have heard that I went on a 10 day silent Buddhist retreat in August. I learned a lot of things on that retreat.

- First I learned how to be silent (I know that may seem hard to believe. When I got back June said if she had known that silence was so important, she would have used duct tape. )
- Then I learned how to sit for hours on end (“So how come you still can’t sit still at church, June asked.)
- Of course I learned a lot about myself—especially how much my internal chatter and constant distractions keep me from being fully alive.

But the one term I encountered there that I think is particularly appropriate for us here today at St. Davids is what Buddhists call Dana, or generosity.

I had signed up on line for the retreat, and had not been sent a bill for the 10 days lodging and food before I arrived. When I got there I found out there were only two paid staff members and the rest were volunteers. We were fed, we had a place to sleep, a place to meditate, and teachers who advised us. All of it was provided without charge. At the end of the retreat we learned why. We experienced one of the central tenants of Buddhism—generosity. Others had contributed money or had served as volunteer work so that we could be there on this retreat. There was construction going on for additional sleeping quarters, and the builders were volunteers too who would periodically join our meditation times and meals.

The primary teacher of this lineage who works in India started offering retreats in his home and then expanded so that others could come. He decided not to charge anything for the retreats even in the midst of all the poverty in India. The hundreds of thousands who now follow this practice in India are have become the volunteers and the financial support for all the new retreats. And this is the pattern in the

centers all over the world. At the end of the retreat, remembering that others had made my retreat possible, I gladly made my Dana.

So what does this have to do with St. Davids? When June and I came to Cullowhee we were very broke. What we contributed to St. Davids was a pittance. And yet the parish supported us by providing programs for our children. We were blessed by the music from the organ and from the talented musicians including the St Davids' strings group by the children. This is where we found our life long friends and a congregation which cared for us when we needed attention and called on us because they valued our presence. And should I mention the food? What a blessing we have received from this church. We received far more than we could repay then or now.

But long before we came in 1968, this beautiful church was built by David Davies because he had not had to have his leg amputated as a young man and because he wanted a place where his daughter could be married. And then Rufus Morgan, a young minister at the time the church had been de consecrated because there were no members, began walking over to Cullowhee from Waynesville to develop a congregation that would eventually have the church re-consecrated. At other times since, we relied on lay ministers to carry on services and even conduct services for the church in Cherokee. And of course what would St. Davids be without Michael, Alice, Heber Peacock, Sherry Matson, John Rivers and all those ministers who came before and served us abundantly far beyond what they were paid for.

As I was thinking of what we are called to do during stewardship season I was reminded of seeing all those who were on the retreat with me. We did not talk with each other and though we passed in silence, I observed how each added to the experience in their individual ways. To me, St. Davids is a sanctuary, a retreat, a place set aside for those who are following a similar path, seeking to live life more fully. On that path:

- Some walk resolutely with eyes on the path of Jesus

- Some look around for those they can help
- Others organize things that need doing
- Some lead in song or study or ministry
- Some serve those outside the church in need of help or in prison or who are sick or alone
- Others bring gloves and shovels and tools to keep up this place
- And some spend time looking out these windows bringing in the light and reflecting it back on all of us.
- Each of you adds your own contribution on our path together

But what about those who come to Cullowhee in the future? Generosity is not a matter of giving money and time in thanks for what has been given to you. That is gratitude. It is really repayment for what you received. True generosity is giving of your time and treasure to make it possible for others in the future to share the blessings you now enjoy. Others have made it possible for us to sit here this morning on this glorious fall day and they have done it out of the generosity of their hearts. It is time for us to prepare a place for those who come after.