

Good morning! I am honored and humbled to speak to you today and to have been granted a Lay Preacher's license by Bishop Susan. I would like to share with you a little of what has led me to this place in my spiritual journey.

My name is Tammy Shackelford (but around here I often add Feild at the end to let you know that I am proudly married to Rob Feild) I was baptized and confirmed in the Episcopal church have been a member of St. David's for over 17 years having joined when Rob and I got married.

During that time I have worked for four Episcopal churches as well as serving as the assistant to the Suffragan Bishop in the Diocese of Virginia (the one across the river). I attended four semesters at the Baptist Theological Seminary and I am currently participating in the Episcopal Education for Ministry program or EfM. I am excited to have the opportunity to use my education and experience as your lay preacher.

Today I will also use my experience as a fundraiser for churches and nonprofits as I talk about our annual pledge campaign. (And before you begin to think Poor Tammy, she has been stuck with talking about money, I want to let you know that I LOVE asking people to give to community organizations, churches and good causes. Why? Because when I give a contribution to an organization or cause that I believe in I feel GOOD and I want all of you to feel good too as I ask you to support the St. David's Annual Pledge Campaign.)

For those who are new to St. David's, the Annual Pledge Campaign is an opportunity for us to give a good-faith indication of our financial commitment to the church in 2023. Based on all of our pledges, the Vestry develops a budget with which we can offer our ministries of worship, prayer, pastoral care, community outreach, Christian formation, fellowship and hospitality & inclusion. In 2023 we will add another ministry, a Little Free Library, where we can reach out to our neighbors young and old. In creating a Little Free Library we will be joining over 150,000 communities around the world that offer free books for children and adults. To fill our Little Free Library we are asking everyone to bring a copy of your favorite book to turn in with your pledge card next week. The book can be new or gently used and for an adult or a child. Just think, we will be able to use the Little Free Library too, and get a chance to read books that have been enjoyed by other members of St. David's and our neighborhood

This year's annual pledge campaign theme is "Seek and read from the book of the Lord." So, let's do just that and open the book of the Lord to see what the Bible says about stewardship.

Stewardship is the recognition that all we have, our money, our time, our talents, are all from God. And like we say each week, *“All things come from thee or Lord, and of thine own have we given thee.”* This verse from I Chronicles reads in full,

“But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.”

What can you offer willingly of your time, talent and treasure to help fulfill the mission of St. David's? Our mission is to be a church on the corner wherever you are - spiritually, physically and beyond. Our goal as a church is to reach out to our community both church members and our neighbors. We aim to meet each person on their spiritual path, providing pastoral care, open and inclusive worship, and pathways to spiritual discovery and personal growth. All of this is only possible because of the generosity of **this congregation**, people like you and me. People who live in gratitude and abundance. Like we read in Matthew Verse 6:

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. The verse continues “For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

When we live from a position of abundance as church members and as a church, many things are possible. We can start a Little Free Library. We can continue to support CCHASM food pantry, Home Again Men's Shelter, CARITAS, Richmond Animal League and host a Boy Scout Troop. Our Memorial Garden, our Prayer Garden and our Labyrinth can continue to be places where our community finds solace and connection with the Holy Spirit. When we live knowing that we are giving back to God that which he has given us, we can give more generously.

Our financial support of St. David's ministries allows us to continue meeting our parishioners and visitors where they are. We haven't had to cut down to one service or close our doors because of the effect the COVID-19 Pandemic has had on our attendance and membership. We are able to offer inclusive worship services including an early service for those who need a quiet, contemplative experience as well as a family-friendly service with lively music and special time and place in the service for our young children. This streamed service welcomes our community worshipping from home.

Furthermore, we are able to have a staff that offers weekly Bible Study, Christian Formation for all ages, a vibrant youth ministry, and we have a priest that is here each week while adding to the discourse of Christian theology as a published author. Your generosity makes all this possible.

We have so much - individually and collectively. If we open the Lord's book again, we read in Luke 12:

"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."

This week when you are filling out your pledge card, I encourage you to look on the back and see the giving chart. You will notice that giving 10% of your income or the Biblical Tithe is highlighted.

If you are able to give 10% of your annual income that is wonderful, but no matter your giving level, I encourage you to read and pray on Proverbs Verse 3 Chapters 9-10, which reads:

"Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine."

While we don't have barns to be filled with plenty, we do have bank accounts and a household budget. Have you considered preparing your budget with what you will give to the church and other causes you support FIRST, knowing that there will be plenty for the rest of what you need? I encourage you to try this - because we are called by God to give back to him the "firstfruits" of our produce. I understand that giving 10% of your annual income may be difficult at this time, but please be intentional and generous in your giving to the church, for St. David's is nothing without you and without me sharing our time, our talent, and our treasure. With your help we can continue to reach out to those who are seeking, hurting, and in need of healing.

We could continue to *"Open and read from the book of the Lord."* There are over 2300 verses about money, our relationship with money and what God expects us to do with our money. Recently we have had scripture readings about money including Luke 12:34,

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Please return your pledge card with an intentional, generous and prayerful pledge during the service next week. Bring your pledge card and a book or two.

Remember that your pledge is not binding, but your best estimate of your giving to the church helps the vestry to develop an accurate budget for the year. Consider giving 3% more than you did last year and develop your family budget for 2023 with giving to the church first on your spreadsheet. If you can't tithe yet, consider tithing unexpected money that you receive during the year - birthday presents, checks from the Commonwealth of Virginia, or your tax refund and give above and beyond your pledge.

Trust me, it will feel really good.