

After the church service, seven-year-old Brian said to the preacher: “When I grow up, I’m going to give you some money.”

“Well, thank,” the preacher replied, “but why?”

“Because my daddy says that you’re the poorest preacher we’ve ever had.”

Father O’Malley was driving down to Boston when he got stopped for speeding. The highway patrol office smelled alcohol on the priest’s breath and then saw an empty wine bottle on the floor of the car.

He said, ‘Father, have you been drinking?’

‘Only water’, replied Father O’Malley.

The office asked, ‘Then how come I can smell wine?’

The priest looked at the bottle and said,

‘Good Lord! He’s done it again.’

I visited my family in California two weeks ago. I stayed at my sister and brother-in-law’s home. In their neighborhood are giant eucalyptus trees, some towering 75 to 80 feet tall. Perhaps you have heard of the six-year drought that California has been in.

Water usage is rationed in all Calif. Municipalities. In my sister’s city it is down to just two days a week you can water your yard, garden or trees. The eucalyptus trees are dying because of the lack of water. These towering trees, as they die, not only turn brown, they begin to fall over, ever so slightly, a little bit

each day. They lie at hazardous angles, tempting fate that they will crash down on to yards, cars, or in the streets. Then they are cut down because of the danger.

Our spiritual lives are always in need of living waters. Psalm 1 reminds us of our blessing from God, that we can be happy/blest if we delight in the law of the Lord. We will be like trees planted by streams of water and we will thrive and prosper. The ideal is to remain in God's word and in doing God's will, we find joy and blessing. Being fed by Scripture, standing tall and bearing fruit, we do not wither or fall over, we prosper and the greatest thing is, we live forever.

But, how likely are we to do that in our lives? I believe we need a rest, a break from that sort of discipline but sometimes the dry spells last longer than planned. We experience droughts in our lives and we wonder, how do I get back to where I once was?

The odds of reviving our spiritual life and fulfilling God's call to care for others – seems like a one-in-a million shot!

And yet, God still needs us to care. There are...

7.5 billion people on the face of the earth; that's a lot of hungry souls.

2.1 billion are considered Christian (about 30%). Lots of possibilities.

God is constantly challenging us, "Who's going to care for my people?"

If each Christian cared for 3.57 people, then we could cover the needs of the world's population. There's an idea, but not realistic.

Today, is Stephen Ministry Sunday. We recognized our Stephen Ministers and Leaders, a total of 44 dedicated, caring people, who make up a significant part of the Pastoral Care work done at Valley Presbyterian Church.

So, today we're talking about care; care of ourselves and care for others. Of course, that seems like Christianity 101. We know that! Yet, we go through those dry spells and need refreshment and renewal.

Let us not be silenced by droughts within us. The tree that yields its fruit is green, full of sap and vigor, transplanted to a place of nourishment, to a place of blessing. Moving to a place of blessing, for you and me, means living a life in obedience to God.

We began our Generosity Campaign today too with Bob Campbell speaking about giving and many aspects of Pastoral Care Ministries here at VPC. VPC has a lot of ministries to serve others in the name of Christ. We are always in need of new volunteers, passionate and energized to sustain these ministries; Christians who are spiritually fed and willing to feed others the gift of God's love and grace. I believe that volunteers are like a one-in-a-million person: they are special, unusual and admired. So I ask you and me...

“How can we be like that?”

All volunteers in God's army are special - they are that one-in-a-million person who gives freely of themselves to serve God.

It's not that big of a longshot for us to serve God. I don't think Christians helping others is too far-fetched for most of us, but we've been warned about advice from the wicked, taking the path of sinners, and the reality of droughts, where the tall, Eucalyptus trees, without water, dry up and fall over.

I was like that once!

I was a workaholic. I didn't go to church much; too tired, too busy. I had nothing and no-one spiritually replenishing my reserves. I remember a vivid dream I had at this time. I was driving down one of those big California freeways. There were five lanes or more, but no other cars but the one I was driving. I felt in control; no-one around me. I could drive as fast as I wanted and I began to speed up and the faster I went the less control I had of that car. Then, all of a sudden I lost control and started spinning around and around. I was so scared I woke up. My life, at that point, was literally out-of-control, like my dream. God didn't give up on me, but I was giving up on God. I needed God back in my life. I needed to slow down. I needed to get back to church.

As I began attending church on a regular basis my life changed. I soon joined Stephen Ministry. I began to feel spiritually fed and nourished. I became a caregiver to others and soon the waters of life, began to flow back towards me. My dry, spiritual life began to be renewed and restored. That feeling of being out-of-control left me as I learned to get out of myself and learned to serve others. The

more I served God by attendance in church and helping others, the more God's living waters fed me.

When you come to church, when you volunteer at church, when you give out of love for God and love for your neighbor, you too will be fed spiritually. The living waters will indeed replenish you and renew your life.

After six years as a Stephen Minister, I went to Stephen Leadership training. While there, I made the decision to go to seminary. That was 1998. I continually need spiritual nourishment, otherwise I will dry up and fall over.

I believe the verse from Galatians tells us how to be refreshed, "Bear (share) one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). And going back to Psalm 1, if we fulfill the law of God, we are transplanted near streams of water; living waters that will renew and refresh us. I believe it is in the very act of serving/volunteering where we are renewed.

The Apostle Paul calls us to be servants. But, to be a servant is more than choosing when, where, and whom we will serve; it is a style of life. Our hope is that we willfully become servants, that we willfully "bear (share) one another's burdens" because that act of servanthood fulfills Christ's command to love one another, as he has loved us.

The Apostle wrote, "if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor. 12:26).

This sharing together of our lives comes from the Greek word *koinonia*. In English, our best translation is *fellowship* – but it means so much more than that – because it encompasses sharing in all its varied ways; This past week at our Session meeting we talked about Fellowship and how we experience it at our church. Each Elder and Pastor came forward and expressed one or more thoughts about what fellowship means to them. We said things like, “Fellowship is worshipping together,” “Fellowship is caring for one another,” “Fellowship is listening to each voice,” “Fellowship is laughing together,” “Fellowship is praying together,” “Fellowship is studying Scripture together,” “Fellowship is serving together,” and “Fellowship is _____” You fill in what fellowship means to you.

In *koinonia*, we are bound to each other, to Christ, and to God and his law. Our life is a shared life; we bear and share one another’s burden. This is not only the role of a Stephen Minister, it is the role for each and every Christian – not one-in-a-million, but you; special, unique, admired, gifted and blessed by God. Everyone! You and me!

This is hopeful news from God! It is healing news! God watches over those who watch over his people. Proverbs 11:25 says, “A generous person will be refreshed, and one who gives water will get water.” Let us be generous and bear one another’s burdens. We’re all one-in-a-million! Amen.