

SUE

We are Sue and Jason Snape, and we were asked to speak about stewardship this morning. When Jason and I started talking about how we would deliver this talk as a couple, I thought Jason could just do the whole thing and I'll stand here and hold his hand, we thought we could finish each other's sentences or that we could each read every other word. Well, lucky for you we're not doing any of those things. We can't just give as a married couple. If we don't both believe in giving as individuals, we can't give as a family. It would be one-sided. We will each tell you about our individual giving experiences and then our story as a couple.

JASON

I'm Jason Snape. I like to draw. My parents were always supportive about that. So, appropriately, this is the first gift I gave to the church, when I was maybe five. I gave it to Father Dorst, the rector at Christ Episcopal Church in Binghamton, NY, as he processed out at the end of the service.

Apparently, in church I had crayons and lots of time to focus. Father Dorst married my parents and baptized me, and when Father Dorst died, his wife sent me this drawing. So I guess that God is in the giving.

Owen was born in 2002, and when my parents came to visit us, they went to St.Catherine's on Sunday. Later, they mentioned to me that Fr.Jim reminded them of Father Dorst. So here we are – Sue and I and Owen and Eva and my parents, all at St.Catherine's. That is a gift, every Sunday.

Why did I give Father Dorst this picture? Was I really so moved by his sermon? Even he knew better than that, I'm sure. I learned to give from my parents, my brothers and the rest of my family. I learned an enormous amount about giving from Sue, and from Owen and Eva. I give to them, to my students, to the Red Cross, to my neighbors and to strangers. I've learned how to give, but I don't always manage my giving well. I have to work at that. So after all the commitments to family and home and others, why do I give to St.Catherine's? Here's a few reasons.

The first concerns my sketchbooks. This is one of them, number 22, and I fill about one a year, so they go back to 1989. They are filled with design work, writing, nonsense drawings, dreams and joys and fears and frustrations. They contain drawings by Owen and Eva, which add wonderful chaotic color to my preference for black ink. Before they were born, many pages were full of heavy musings. Who am I? Where am I supposed to be going? What is all this stuff I put in these sketchbooks? Sue listened very patiently to this every few months. Then one day, one of you, a friend at St.Catherine's,

made the very quiet, very simple comment that these sketchbooks were full of my conversations with God. It was a staggering concept that I fell in love with. Your comment was a gift.

The second story is about Holy Week. About four years ago, I decided that I wanted to experience Easter differently, and began by going to the Healing Service. When we were invited to come to the rail for a healing blessing, I remained in my seat; I was there to participate in the service, but I felt fine. I didn't need healing. But then one of you passed by me and whispered "Are you going up for a blessing?" I thought about that invitation. Am I going? Why would I go? Why not? Then it occurred to me that perhaps there are broken things in me that I'm not aware of. Maybe I have wounds that I am blind to. Who am I to know everything about me? It was a fascinating realization. Your question was a gift.

The third story is about the Lord's Prayer. At one service, I sat next to one of you. When we all held hands to pray together, you held my hand in a grip that took my breath away. I felt like a drowning man that you were hauling out of the sea. It was a grip like iron. It was a grip that made it impossible to say that prayer I've said all my life, because I could only think "you are holding onto me for dear life", – an incomprehensible feeling. Then I thought, "Am I saving you? Or are you saving me?" It did not trouble me that I could not answer this. We're saving each other, every day. You holding my hand was a gift.

The last story is about Sue. After a huge and necessary change in your career, you became the chef at a Buckhead restaurant. This was a great joy to me because, like me being an at-home dad or illustrating or becoming a teacher, you are now living into your passion. Every week you have a story of how you offered something to someone in need – someone with no home, someone with a deep illness, someone with a broken heart. Every week you also have a story of how someone came to you and shared their stories of love, perseverance, giving, and awe at what life brings. You, in turn, share these stories with us at dinner. Your ability to see God in others is wonderful. You are a gift.

These are all powerful experiences that resonate in me. I have had countless more as I've worked with you, prayed with you, eaten with you, laughed and cried and sang with you. All of you have fed and nourished me. You have opened my eyes and my heart. Is this God? Is this you? Is there any difference?

So why do I give to St.Catherine's?

To say thank you. Thank you for teaching me about thermostats and roofs and lightbulbs and teenagers. Thank you for inviting us in. Thank you for loving me, Sue, my children and my parents. Thank you for helping our marriage and our parenting. Thank you for teaching us to look for God everywhere and in everyone – and that we will never be alone. Thank you for helping me find words and images and actions to thank God for all the astonishing gifts in my life. Including every one of you. That is why I give.

SUE

I was raised, baptized, and received confirmation in a Presbyterian church. As a member of the youth group, I went on mission projects and had overnights, but I can't remember the first time I really gave to the church – consciously gave to the church. I used to think "Well, I've worked hard for my money, so it's mine. I earned that car, or I earned the ability to go out to a nice dinner. They are mine." And then a few things in my life changed, which also changed how I viewed my "stuff".

When Owen was born, my Dad said to me, "God gave Owen to you. Just know that he's not really yours to have, he's just yours to borrow for a little while." I think of this fairly often, but it wasn't until just a few years ago that I realized that that holds true for everything I have in my life. Nothing is really mine.

I've been a part of various ministries and volunteer positions since joining St. Catherine's, but there are three in particular that I would like to comment on.

When we received the invitation from Father Jim to join a Marriage Journey group, I thought, "Well, he asked us, so we can't say NO." At the first meeting, we met people that we didn't know, at all different stages in their lives. I thought for sure that it was going to be an intervention or something. When I left that night, I wondered "What in the world do Jason and I have to share with these people about marriage?" Over time, I was surprised to learn that we all had wisdom and experiences to share. Maybe that was my first realization that I could give back to the church without being INSIDE church. I didn't have to be sitting IN the pew to give back. Over the eight years we've been meeting with our Marriage Journey group, we've taken and given quite a bit. I'm grateful for that.

Then we took Dave Ramsey's financial peace class. Jason and I are both fairly frugal. But we wanted to make sure we were handling our assets as best we could. We make money and put it in the bank and when we feel like "treating" ourselves, we go to Kohl's and get a new pair of pants or I get my hair cut. But it seems different when it comes to giving to others. It's fascinating, actually, now that I'm

thinking about it, that we can spend weeks thinking about whether or not we should get a new pair of shoes, but then without hesitation we'll support MUST ministries with our kids. I think I can do this because we've grown to learn and appreciate that things work out okay.

Lastly, in 2009 I attended an Adult Sunday school class where we had to answer this question: "If you were told you had one year to live, would you continue to live the way you are now?" Wow. That was a question that has changed my life, because my answer was a big NO. I needed to make some giant changes – I needed to quit my job.

But my job was our primary income. It gave us insurance. We had to spend a lot of time soul searching about how to make money AND be happy AND keep health insurance AND have more time for my family. Finally, Jason and I decided together that the negatives of staying in an unhealthy state outweighed the unknowns of quitting. I think both of our parents thought we were crazy. And I say we... not just me... because I reached the heights of that job with the unending support of Jason, and it was OUR decision for me to quit, not just mine. In addition was St.Catherine's impact on our adventure – people gave me ideas, shared their entrepreneurial advice, and referred me to others who offered me suggestions. It was an unreal experience.

So here we are, and three plus years have gone by. We survived more than a 50% cut in income. We weren't sure how it was all going to work out, but the increase in happiness seemed to make up for the loss in dollars. What was strange was that, even with this cut, we stuck with our stewardship pledge and even added some. Our supposed loss somehow allowed us share more of our treasure, time, and talent with the church than we ever had before.

All three of these opportunities, for different reasons, have changed the way I live my life, how we live our lives together, how I respect my relationship with Jason, how we spend and save money, how we schedule and share our time and how we just *give*.

Why do I give to St. Catherine's? Because, selfishly, *giving makes me feel good*. It just feels right to give to others- food, clothing, a hug, support to a friend in a terrible situation- it's just what I want to do. Not *should* do. I want to do it. It feels right. It's why I'm here. Often, there's not necessarily much conscious thought behind it for me. Some things in life I over-think. Not giving.

So why do we give to the church? We as a family? BECAUSE WE CAN.

How could we NOT give back? And it's not just about a monthly dollar amount. We give of our time and talent as often and as much as we can. BECAUSE WE CAN. There have been times when Jason has volunteered, again, and again, to help out with something or someone and I feel like his time should have been with us at home. BUT...then I realized- supporting Jason in his giving is really important ; that was a new way for me to look at it. It wasn't Jason being out another night, it was him helping others. I decided to support that. Once I made that mind shift and lost my attitude, life seemed much happier, I was more grateful and certainly thankful that I chose to spend my life with Jason.

This month we will celebrate our 16th wedding anniversary and we look forward to many more years of giving to our family, our community, and especially, St.Catherine's.