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First Presbyterian Church of Allegan, MI

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There is the old story of a church where a certain member had a favorite hymn that she loved to hear sung in worship. While having favorite hymns is a good and a normal thing, the problem was that this woman wanted that one particular hymn sung in worship every week. She would complain loudly and bitterly to the pastor if he attempted to have a worship service without it.

And so because she kept making such a fuss, the pastor finally accommodated her demand. Each week, at the end of the service, the closing hymn was to always be her favorite, "Standing on the Promises." After a couple of weeks of this practice, some of the other church members began to complain. --They liked that hymn, but they didn't want to sing it every week. After about a month, once that song began to play, a small group of members would immediately leave the sanctuary to go get their coffee early. Soon many of the members were following that example, and the final hymn turned into sort of a postlude, with many people talking while they were walking out while some people remained firmly standing in place singing it.

Not to be outdone by this rude response to her favorite hymn, the woman recruited ushers to stand by the doors to keep people from leaving the sanctuary early. Someone else retaliated to that action by tearing the hymn, "Standing on the Promises" out of each of the hymnbooks one night. This destruction of church property was a call to war, and phones were ringing and people were being recruited to take sides on the issue.

By this point, the denominational folks heard about what was happening and they stepped in to try to help. They encouraged the pastor and the elders to stand up to this woman. And so the leadership did. They planned the next Sundays worship service and they did not include, "Standing on the Promises". As worship began that next Sunday, the leadership watched in trepidation as this woman looked over her bulletin before worship. When she realized that they were not going to be singing, "Standing on the Promises", she closed her bulletin with a sharp snap, stood up and walked out of the sanctuary. The rest of the congregation cheered. And because she was not yet out of the building she heard it. She was too embarrassed to ever go back to her church again.

Our stewardship campaign this year is an opportunity to have our lives be less about ME and more about the community. Instead of thinking about what I want, we need to think in terms about what WE want. Instead of complaining when we don't get our way, instead of whining and griping about our preferences; our gifts to God and to each other involves a serious commitment to living into a spirit of GRATITUDE.

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