

Stewards of the Gospel and United Mission
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When we are united in God's mission,
Our United Mission will grow.

A story out of the Jewish tradition has taken on great significance for me as I have considered my life as a journey of a Christian steward.

A poor Jewish man, Eizik, son of Yekel, lived in the city of Krakow. One night he dreamed that, in the far city of Prague, buried at the foot of the bridge that went across the Vltava River, was a great treasure. When he awoke the next morning, he remembered his dream but did not think too much about it because it is not that unusual to have such dreams. However, that night he had the same dream again. This continued night after night, the same dream, until ten days and nights had gone by. Finally, Eizik concluded that he had no choice but to make a journey to the far city of Prague to see if a great treasure really was buried where he had seen it in his dream.

He set out on the journey to Prague, a journey that took many days and was very difficult. As he approached the city of Prague, he saw the Vltava River, just as he had seen it in his dream. Crossing the river was a bridge, just as in his dream. He hurried to the foot of the bridge, where in his dream the treasure had been buried.

As he bent over and started to dig, he felt a hand grasp his shoulder and heard a voice say to him, "What do you think you're doing here?" It was the hand and the voice of a soldier. Poor Eizik was so startled that he could think of nothing to do except to stammer out the truth. He told the soldier of his dream and of his long journey to Prague to seek the buried treasure. On hearing the story, the soldier laughed, gave Eizik a kick, and said, "You stupid Jew, don't you know that we all have dreams like that? But it makes no sense to pay attention to them. I myself had such a dream. I dreamed that in the far city of Krakow, in the house of a poor Jew names Eizik, son of Yekel, a great treasure was buried beneath the stove. Now, wouldn't I be stupid if I left my post and made a long journey to Krakow and went searching through the city looking for the house of a poor Jew named Eizik? Why, there are probably many Jews with that name." With that, he gave Eizik another kick and said, "Now, go on home!"

Eizik made the long journey back to Krakow, went to his home, moved aside the stove, and dug. There he found a great treasure of gold!

The treasure of gold did not lie in the far city. Instead, Eizik discovered that the treasure had been very near to him for many years. But the knowledge of the treasure involved a long and difficult journey.

In Isaiah 55:1-2, an Old Testament poet issued an invitation to persons of faith:

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

The human being's need for God is an all-consuming thirst. It is a need that leads from a thirst based on anxiety and the felt need for "more," to a thirst for the gospel of God. In the words of the prayer of St. Augustine, "You have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

To be a steward of the gospel is to drink deeply from the waters of the living God by moving from the stagnating waterholes of "more" to the living water of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and inviting others to do the same.

We have the opportunity to drink deeply from the living water of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and invite others to do the same. Our invitation may be offered by each of us to other persons. As American Baptists, we can also invite others to the living water through the ministries supported by United Mission: International Ministries, the American Baptist Home Mission Societies, American Baptist Churches in the USA, and our American Baptist Region.

As Eizik learned, the treasure is not at some distant location. It is very near us—within our reach.