

This is the story of the Stone Soup. Many of you have heard it before but some may not. Even if you have heard it before, please listen and reflect on what this story might mean to this community, to the community that is St. Paul's.

Once upon a time a stranger rode his tired horse down a back country road on his way home from a long journey. It was late afternoon and the man was tired and hungry. Ahead he saw a small village. "I'll get something to eat there and find a place for the night.", he thought.

Suddenly the horse tripped, throwing the stranger to the ground. As he brushed himself off, he saw that the horse had stumbled over a rock sticking out of the ground in the middle of the road. He walked over to it and dug it out of the earth so that it would not trip anyone else. It was a splendid rock, almost perfectly round and smooth. The stranger liked the rock, so rather than throw it away, he put it in his saddle bag, climbed up on his horse, and continued into the village.

As he road past the first houses the village people stopped their to stare. He waved to several of them, but no one waved back. He got off his horse and approached a woman standing in front of a small house. "Good evening," he said cheerfully, "Could you spare a bit of food for a hungry man?"

The woman began shaking her head almost before he had finished his sentence. "We have had a poor harvest here. We are very worried that there is barely enough food for our family. I am sorry." And she walked into her house and shut the door.

The man continued to the next house where a farmer was working on his wagon. "Do you have a place at your table for a hungry traveler?" he asked. "It didn't rain during the last month before harvest," the farmer said. "What little we have is needed for our children."

At every home the stranger heard the same sad story: The harvest had been poor, there was not enough food to make it through the winter. Everyone was very worried about themselves and their immediate family.

Completely discouraged and very hungry the man sat down under a tree in the village square. "Poor people," he thought, "in a few weeks they will be as hungry as I am." Suddenly an idea hit him. He reached into his saddle

bag, took out the stone and addressed the villagers. "Gentle folk of the village", he shouted, "Your worries are over. I have in my hand a special stone that will help take you through the long winter. This is a magic stone. With it you can make stone soup."

"Stone soup?" and old man repeated. "I have never heard of stone soup."
"The wonder of stone soup," the stranger continued, "is that it not only feeds hungry people, it also brings people together. Now who has a large empty pot?"

Quickly a huge iron pot was found, and delivered to the stranger in a wheel barrow. "The kettle is barely large enough, but it will do," the stranger said. "Now we must fill the pot with water and start a fire."

Eager hands carried buckets of water and firewood. Soon the pot was placed over a roaring fire. As the water began to boil the stranger dramatically raised the magic stone above his head, and then he gently placed it in the kettle. "Stone soup needs salt and pepper," the stranger announced.

Two children ran to find salt and pepper. After the water had boiled for few minutes the stranger sipped the brew. "This stone makes an excellent soup, but it would be better if we had a few carrots."

"We have a few carrots that we're willing to share," a farmer replied. Immediately his daughter ran home and returned with an apron full of carrots.

"Its too bad the harvest was so bad," said the stranger. "Stone soup is always much more tasty when we add a cabbage or two."

"I think I know where to find a cabbage," a young mother shouted as she dashed towards her home. When she returned she was carrying three large cabbages.

The stranger was busy slicing carrots and cabbages with his hunting knife. "The last time I made stone soup was at the castle of a rich man. He added a few potatoes and a bit of beef."

Several people talked quietly, "A bit of beef and we can eat like rich people", they whispered. They went home and soon returned not only with beef and potatoes, but some brought milk, onions and barley too.

By the time the soup was ready it was almost dark. It was the most delicious soup that they had ever smelled and to think, it all came from the magic stone. The stranger finally declared that it was done and invited everyone to have as much as they could eat.

After everyone had eaten their full, some folk brought out their fiddles. Everyone began to sing and dance - and they continued till the wee hours of the morning. Never had the village people had such a wonderful party.

The next morning the whole village gathered to say goodbye to the stranger. As he mounted his horse a small child called out, "You forgot to take your magic stone!"

The stranger smiled. "I am going to leave the stone with you as gift of gratitude for your hospitality," he said. "Remember, as long as you make stone soup, you will never have to worry about being hungry."

As he rode off a grandfather put his arm around the shoulders of his young granddaughter and said, "Do you remember the other bit of magic that the stranger promised when you make stone soup?" he asked. "Yes," she said, "the stone brings people closer together."

Today, this day of stewardship celebration, this Sunday before Thanksgiving, we celebrate our own Stone Soup. In a few minutes we will place our offerings on the altar, the bits and pieces from our resources that we have offered to this community that together we might create something bigger and richer than we could create on our own. It can be so easy to hang on to what we have, especially in the midst of the never-ending "recover" that we find ourselves in. It can be so easy to despair and say to ourselves, "I had better hang on to every penny that I have because I might not make it through the winter." But the funny thing is that clinging to what we have brings us scarcity rather than abundance. The villagers from our story couldn't live on the meager resources that they each had in their own homes, but when they brought their resources together, they were able to have a feast.

Your offering might not have much impact in the world if it were the only offering, but when your offering is combined with everyone else's offerings it becomes much greater. The whole is definitely greater than the sum of its parts. Combined, all of our offerings come together to create this rich and wonderful community that is St. Paul's. Combined, all of our offerings come together to make God known in our little patch of the world in Southington, Connecticut. Combined, all of our offerings come together to make this world a little better place than it was before, to give the world a little glimpse of the kingdom of God--the world as God would have it be. Your \$100, \$1000, or \$10,000 might not go far on its own, but when combined with everyone else's \$100, \$1000, or \$10,000 it is very powerful.

Today, we give thanks for our Stone Soup. We give thanks for the abundance that we have in our midst when we come together as a community. Now, if you haven't yet had a chance to contribute something to our Stone Soup, or if you'd like to contribute a little bit more, the pot is always on and the soup is always cooking. Your contribution matters. Our Soup is not complete without your contribution to it.

As we move through the rest of our service, I hope that you will pause and say a prayer of thanksgiving to God for our Stone Soup and for this community. We are stronger together than we could ever be apart. I give thanks to God for blessing each and every one of us with this community and I pray that we will never forget the lesson of the story of the stone soup.

Amen