

Discipleship And Stewardship

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[0 : 00] Inform and inflame our hearts. Inform our hearts what it is that you have done for us. And inflame our hearts with the desire to share what you've done with everyone else.

We ask this in your holy name. Amen. As a member of the congregation of St. John's Parish, this week I received from Mr. David Howard a letter which contained this information on stewardship at St. John's, which was very interesting and which, if you were here last week, you will know contains an error.

And if you have a pocket computer, you can spend the time during this sermon figuring out what the error is. But it also contained this financial commitment card for the year 1984.

Well, that's not all. I received that as a member of the congregation. I also received instructions from Mr. Howard and his committee that I was to preach to you about stewardship this morning. And it's not an easy thing to talk to people about money because it comes very close to our hearts and stirs up a lot of feelings one way and another.

[1 : 36] And the thing that we've learned about our Christian faith is God has made a commitment to us. And we're a little bit wary, and I think rightly wary, of supposing that our faith is based on our commitment to God, when in fact it's not.

It's based on God's commitment to us. So that the only light in which I could receive this would be supposing that because of God's commitment to me, I am required to respond.

And this may be a good way of responding. So it says, God willing, and I'm to sign this. God willing, it is my intention to support our church and its work to the extent of blank dollars a week during the year 1984.

I'm not even through 1983 yet. And so I'm asked for this commitment. Then it says that this commitment may be revised should circumstances make it necessary.

I presume that what Mr. Howard meant by this was simply that if God blesses us more than we now expect, that we would want to revise it upwards.

[3 : 07] But you can take that any way you like. And then it asks for me to sign my name in faith and gratitude.

And then it wants my name and my telephone number and my address, and it wants me to please place this card in a return envelope provided, which had a stamp on it.

And then it said that it's all very confidential. And it is, I know. But just who is this, Mr. Howard, and what does he think he's asking?

Well, I don't know what you've done with the card, but I've wrestled for a long time this week with how to present it to you and how to receive it myself.

And I think it could be enormously helpful. I don't think it will be enormously helpful to anybody who is not, in some sense, a serious disciple of Jesus Christ.

[4 : 19] I don't think it would make sense at all. It would just be more third-class male. It isn't third-class male, but it would be treated like so much more junk male.

But if you were a serious disciple of Jesus Christ, then I think it has some important things to say to you. And so what I want to talk to you about very briefly is a little bit about discipleship and how you approach this card as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

And there are three verses in Scripture that I want to point you to. One is on page 32 in the New Testament section of the Blue Pew Bible, and it's Matthew 28 and verse 18, almost the last verse of Matthew's Gospel.

And Jesus says these words to his disciples, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

[5 : 51] And that's called the Great Commission. We're to make disciples. So that the first thing that I want you to understand is that we are in the disciple-making business by the explicit orders of the one who is the head of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ.

And the disciple-making business is done through the process of baptism and teaching and the fulfillment of that promise of Christ's presence with us by the Holy Spirit.

So we're making disciples of Jesus Christ. And if you were to turn to John chapter 13 and verse 35, the last of the four Gospels, And this is how you tell disciples of Jesus Christ, how you can identify them.

In verse 35 it says, By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

And so we're in the disciple-making business. When disciples have been made or when you've begun to be a disciple, then that will be evident because of the love you have for those who are the disciples of Jesus Christ, because you share something in common with them.

[7 : 39] So, making disciples, disciples loving one another, and then I want you to look at the only reference to disciples in the whole of the Old Testament, and it's in Isaiah chapter 8 and verse 16, and that's found on page 606 of your Blue Pew Bible.

And it's this rather brief reference to disciples when it says, Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among the disciples.

Well, what I want you to be very much aware of is that I really think that unless you were serious about discipleship, this pledge card and stewardship doesn't mean very much.

If you are serious about discipleship, then I think there are some important things that I'd like to reinforce in your mind.

You see, what Isaiah does in chapter 8, verse 16, is recognize that the message that he has brought to the world and to his community and to his city is not being received by it.

[9 : 22] They are rejecting it and rejecting him. Now, we live in a world where Jesus is rejected and the message that he's brought has been rejected.

What Isaiah did then was to gather together a company of disciples who would take his teaching seriously and who would work out in their lives the meaning of that teaching.

And so Jesus has called together a group of people who are to be baptized, to be taught, to be indwelt by his spirit, and they are to take the message seriously and to demonstrate the meaning of that message for their own community.

One of the members of this congregation is involved in a very exciting project in the northern part of China.

And the project involves a part of China that for its weather and terrain is very like a part of Saskatchewan.

[11 : 05] And the project is to go over there and build a model northern Saskatchewan farm in northern China.

And that farm is meant to be a demonstration of how another nation handles that particular kind of climate and terrain.

So all the secrets of farming in northern Saskatchewan are to be demonstrated in northern China and that's to be a help in feeding one of the most populous nations on the face of the earth.

Well, that's a good model of Christian discipleship. We are called here as the disciples of Jesus Christ in this congregation to be a working model of what would happen in our community if people would take the message of Jesus Christ seriously and seek by the discipling of their lives to live it out before the rest of the community.

That's what discipling means and that's how discipling works. Well, then, how does discipleship find expression?

[12 : 57] It finds expression in love one for another. You may know that in our budget for this year, 1983, we tithe.

That is, we take one-tenth of all that we have and through an outreach committee, give it to work beyond our path so that it has been in a small way, I don't want this to be exaggerated, but in a small way, it's been used to send a student to Kenya for the summer.

It's been used to help with the work of the mission to Seaman. It's been used to help to English language teachers go to China.

It's helped to support a girl who is working as a teacher in Nepal. It's been used to send a small group of St. John'sites out to help with the work in the parish of St. Mary Magdalene and Fort Nelson.

It's been helped. It's been used to help the ministry in Mendenhall this year, particularly because of the floods that occurred down in that part of the state of Mississippi.

[14 : 41] It's been used to help with the work of the Anglican Church in South America.

Now, those are just tiny little spots, really. but they indicate in a practical way what it means to be missionaries, to love one another, to be concerned for Christians in other countries, in other cultures, other languages, other places, who are not as fortunate as we are.

And that's part of loving one another. There is, in addition, however, a very important mission right here on the doorstep of our church so that as soon as you walk out that door, you are, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, a missionary.

One of the things that helped me about St. John's was a senior ecclesiastic came to visit and spend a week with us about a year ago.

It may have been flattering, but I think he meant it. His knowledge may have been very luminal. But he said he thought St. John's was one of the most exciting parishes in the whole of Canada because of the mission that there is here and that we have right here.

[16 : 41] And that mission will be carried forward by our learning to love one another. And I heard what has hurt me very much indeed.

And that is, one of the old members of the parish told me this week that someone complained about St. John's that there are too many new faces.

It isn't the old parish anymore. Now, that may sound a little sad and sentimental to you, but it doesn't sound sad and sentimental to me.

Because one of the fundamental problems of our society is that there are too many new faces. And they aren't just faces. They're whole people with fathers and mothers and children and hope and ambition and longing for relationship and looking for good news.

[17 : 59] They are, they're total people. They're not just new faces. And one of the fundamental issues in our world is that the population of the world has grown so enormously that with the kind of statement that was made, you might well abdicate from the human race.

Because one of the great problems of the human race is that there are too many new faces. And they are hungry and deprived and lack opportunity to hear the gospel, lack opportunity to find out what life means.

So I really pray that if it crosses your mind, because it sometimes does mine, that there are too many new faces, that we may be forgiven.

And not for one moment fail to recognize that the disciples of Jesus Christ express themselves by having love one for another.

so that we are involved in a mission. And the mission that we're involved in, the scope of that mission is to preach, to teach, to heal, and to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[19 : 57] That's the work of our discipleship. discipleship. And we're involved in that work. And there's no way we can escape it.

What we have to do, and I think we have to learn to gossip, gossip. We have to learn to gossip to one another about the good news.

I was, I looked up what gossip means this morning. And what it means is, now this isn't what it means to you and to me in modern language, but what it means originally is that there is the news of Jesus Christ which is to be communicated between people who have a relationship, who are related in God.

At its very root, it means what a God parent is to tell to his God child. What a disciple of Jesus Christ is to tell to someone who may be a new convert.

That's what gossiping the gospel originally meant. And the only way we're going to teach each other discipleship is by sharing with one another the good news of the gospel and learning to do it in that way.

[21 : 39] I think I think that if you would take this card and pray about it and pray your way through it, you will notice that in this last year that the average pledge was \$760.

dollars. Well, I don't know whether you pledged at all or whether you consider it the responsibility that you have as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

But I'd like you to look at your pledge a slightly different way. and that is that God has pledged to you that he won't be your debtor.

So what you should do when you fill out this card is figure out how much you want God to give you in 1984 and he will understand what percentage you're working for.

and that will be your way in faith of claiming God's provision for you in 1984.

[23 : 01] It could mean that, you know. It could mean that to you. You can fill it up and put it in your Bible and not send it in at all. Though you will make Mr. Howard annoyed if you do.

But I think it's probably important that you should share it. That you should share it because of the fact that we are to love one another.

The thing that I think is at the heart of it and that I want just to leave with you is that your gift of money for the work of Christ's mission in the whole world should be a deliberate act of regular worship.

That part of your regular Sunday worship should be the presentation of your offering in faith that God will honor you as you seek to honor him at a level which we all find very difficult.

And if you're an old age pensioner and if you're a student and if you're unemployed and if you're badly in debt or whatever it may be then it's probably even more important for you to look at this because it brings the whole matter of how you're going to be provided for into the context of what you mean when you say give us this day our daily bread.

[24 : 54] That giving should be a deliberate act of regular worship. One final illustration you know that old story about cutting wood heats you twice.

Once in the exercise of cutting it up and once when you burn it in the fireplace. And so I think the deliberate giving as an act of regular worship should be a blessing to you both in doing it and in the final result it has in extending the work of Christ's mission in the world.

All this card represents really is asking you in the company of Christ's disciples to prayerfully answer very simple questions with very profound implications in terms of our discipleship as Christ's church in this place.

Amen.