

Stewardship Of Our Time Talents And Possessions

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[0 : 00] I am proud and happy to announce that yesterday I went to the sail pass at the yacht club. And there were drums and there were rifles and there were cannons and there were ladies dressed up like admirals, which was very admirable.

And there was soldiers and swords and flags and all sorts of pomp and circumstance, which was most enjoyable.

But you couldn't help but be aware that the thing that holds it all together is the sea and the wind and the salt spray and the race and the adventure of sailing itself.

And I tell you that because it may open up to you something of the occupational hazard of being an Anglican minister. When your whole life is taken up with pomp and circumstance and ceremonies and parades and all these lovely things going on, but you miss out on the daily adventure of Christian discipleship, which is really what it's all about.

And the thing that I want all of you to be involved. My responsibility this morning is to talk to you about one of the fundamental aspects of Christian discipleship, and that is the stewardship of all that you have.

[1 : 30] And the recognition that all that you have does not belong to you. In Leviticus 25, which you would find very worthwhile reading, you find the prospect of a jubilee year when everybody gets their money and their land back.

Having sold it, it's all given back to who it started with at the beginning of 50 years. To remind the people that things weren't there, that they belong to the Lord.

It might be helpful now to have a reshuffle of all that we have, in order that we might be reminded that everything we have belongs to God.

You know that part of the ceremony of church life is that the sidesmen come up with the offering, and the server receives it and turns to the minister and hands it to him. And the minister receives the offering and says, All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee.

And that's part of the ritual of every Sunday. But I want to show you where it comes from, because it's much more exciting than that. It comes from the first book of Chronicles, chapter 29, and verse 7.

[2 : 48] And there David is receiving the offerings of all the people. And this is what it says of that important occasion. 1 Chronicles 29, and verse 7.

The following for the work on the temple, 190 tons of gold. That's a reasonable collection for any given day. 380 tons of silver, 675 tons of bronze, 3,750 tons of iron.

Those who had precious stones gave them to the temple treasury, which was administered by Jehiel the Levite of the clan of Gershon. The people had given willingly to the Lord, and they were happy that so much had been given.

And King David was also extremely happy. And there in front of the whole assembly, King David praised the Lord, and he said, Lord, God of our ancestor Jacob, may you be praised forever and ever.

You are great and powerful, glorious, splendid, and majestic. Everything in heaven and earth is yours, and you are king, supreme over all.

[4 : 11] All riches and wealth come from you. You rule everything by your strength and power. You are able to make anyone great and strong.

Now, our God, we give you thanks, and we praise your glorious name. Yet my people and I cannot really give you anything, because everything is a gift from you, and we have only given back what is yours already.

So that every time in the course of our service, when we say, Perhaps by rote, all things come of you, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee.

Think about 1 Chronicles 29, and this tremendous offering, and the tremendous gratitude and joy of the people, and the tremendous humility of David, when he said, Lord, we can't give you anything, because everything we have belongs to you.

And that's what stewardship is about. Now, to bring it down to the practical necessities of everyday life, turn in your prayer book to page 555, and there you'll have it straight, uncompromising, direct, and probably not very helpful.

[5 : 39] But nevertheless, there it is, on page 555. Every Christian man or woman, in the last paragraph, should from time to time frame for himself a rule of life in accordance with the precepts of the gospel and the faith and order of the church, wherein he may consider the following.

The regularity of his attendance at public worship, and especially at the Holy Communion, the practice of private prayer, Bible reading, and self-discipline, bringing the teaching and example of Christ into his everyday life, the boldness of his spoken witness to his faith in Christ, personal service to the church and the community, the offering of money according to his means for the support of the work of the church at home and overseas.

Now, this is a rule of life, but I don't want a community of Christians that work by rule. This is only helpful in the same sense that if somebody lends you their summer cottage, you get there and you find on the kitchen table where you turn on the gas and where you turn on the power and where you turn on the pump and how you lock the door and who comes to look after it and what you need to watch out for and where you might trip if you don't watch when you're going down the cellar stairs.

And having given all those instructions, they then say, have a lovely time. And these are only the basic instructions. They're only really the housekeeping rules of the Christian life.

But the adventure of it is not in becoming a slave to these rules, but in using these rules so you don't get into too much trouble. And so you know how to make the most of all that you've been given.

[7 : 43] The Christian life itself is a dynamic and personal obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord in your life.

And you live not by rules, but you live out of the communion and fellowship that you have with Christ through the fellowship of his church, through the fellowship of the Holy Communion, through the reading and participation in the word of God.

And so Christ confronts you. I don't want to confront you and say you should give more. I know that we have lots of opinions about who should give how much, but really the New Testament says the only person you need to be concerned about in the giving of your time and talent and treasure is yourself.

You don't have to worry about anybody else. Just worry about yourself. And Christ will help you deal with it. And it will come out of the dynamic relationship you have to him.

Maybe you are the rich young ruler who thought his wealth was the mark of his acceptance with God.

[9 : 02] He was a morally good man. And he casually said, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said, keep the rules.

Oh, I've always done that, he said. Well, Christ said, then you won't have any trouble going and selling all that you have and give it to the poor and come and follow me.

In fact, he had the greatest trouble with that because he couldn't dissociate himself from his wealth. Maybe you're like the lovely cartoon that Christ gives us in all three of the Gospels of the rich man whose wealth burdened a camel down and he was standing behind the camel with a stick trying to beat him through a small gate that the camel wouldn't fit through.

And the man couldn't conceive of going through the gate himself without getting all his wealth through the gate too. And so he stands there beating his camel trying to get it to go through because he can't conceive of himself apart from the wealth and prominence that he has gathered unto himself which is represented by the camel.

And if he's going in he wants his wealth there too because he's so dependent on it. That's who he is. And Jesus says to him who you are has nothing whatever to do with your camel.

[10 : 39] Come on in. There's lots of room for you to get in. He says, I won't go in without my camel. And that's the problem that many of us have.

Or maybe you're like the younger brother who went to Christ and said make my older brother share the inheritance with me.

And Christ said that's not my job. And he said that this kind of greed is something that you need to be ashamed of not something you need to work on.

Or maybe you're like the rich fool who gave himself to the enjoyment of his possessions. I will rest and take my leisure.

I will eat, drink, and be merry. He said. And that was the sure sign that he was now possessed by his possessions.

[11 : 38] They were no longer something that he used. They were now things that used him. And he was the captive and slave of what he possessed.

And Jesus said to him, it's perfectly simple. All that you have belongs to you. But you belong to me.

He couldn't see that. And so he was possessed by his possessions. And Christ spoke to him about that.

This is what happens all the way through. The constant mistake that we make is to think that God wants what we have.

And that's not the truth at all. We think that that's what God wants and so we try and give it to him. We think the church is kind of like Robin Hood whose job it is to rob the poor, rob the rich to pay the poor.

[12 : 44] And so we sort of condescend to the church's demands because we hope they will do that. But that's not the function of the church. The function of the church is to tell you you're the poor and God in Christ has provided for you surpassing riches that you've never even imagined.

And he wants to receive. See, the people of the kingdom are a strange bunch of people.

They're old people who are young. They're blind people who can see. They're crippled people who can walk. They're deaf people who can hear. They're poor people who've found tremendous wealth.

They're defenseless people who are without fear. They are sick people who have found life. because they found the reality of the kingdom.

You remember that magnificent rich man in the New Testament who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.

[13 : 59] it's another New Testament cartoon if you want of extreme wealth. And in contrast to this extreme wealth there was at his gate a poor beggar named Lazarus whose body was covered with sores and the dogs came and licked the sores.

Now what that parable says I think is that if Dives had wanted to know about the kingdom it was right there at his front door. But what he was doing was using his money to protect himself from the kingdom not to build himself a bridge into the kingdom.

And that's what Jesus says about the use of our treasures and our talents and our time. we're not to protect ourselves to build a wall around ourselves so that we're not aware of Lazarus lying at the gate.

We're to use all that we've been given so that the infinite treasure far more than Dives ever dreamed of which belonged to this beggar at his gate might be shared with Dives.

But Dives pretended he didn't see him and pretended he didn't hear his cries and pretended he didn't recognize his need and Dives used his wealth and everything to protect himself from the reality of the approach that God was making to him.

[15 : 36] And when we use our wealth in that way we're using it in the wrong way to create barriers and blindness and deafness for ourselves in effect to deceive ourselves function of the kingdom is to allow Lazarus to be able to share with Dives what he's found.

There's a terrible sobering note in the New Testament about the seriousness of this matter and it comes in the fifth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

There the young church in all its enthusiasm were doing things which perhaps were wiser than to do. But one young man went and sold all that he had his house his land and took the money and gave it to the leaders of the young church.

And it was a magnificent gift. He said I'm now going to live by what I can work for with my hand. That so impressed the other Christians that a couple of others thought well we might try that too.

And so they went and sold their house. They put a little bit aside just in case it didn't work. Kept it for themselves just to be sure.

[17 : 10] And then they went and said we've sold our house and these are the proceeds of it and you can have it. They went to Peter and did that.

You know the sad story that the man dropped dead. And I suppose it was a singular and drastic reality for the new church that the hypocrisy of it was so totally alien to the reality of the kingdom.

this community of the Holy Spirit that had been gathered in the faith of Jesus Christ now hypocrisy and pretending had entered into it.

So that when the man's wife came in Peter said to her did you sell your property and she said yes. She said did you keep back part of the price and he said yes.

Peter said why? It was yours to do with whatever you wanted to do. Why did you make this pretense? You see the danger about the giving of our time and our treasure and our talents to the work of God is that it could be not a commitment and an offering inspired by the Holy Spirit in which we give the whole of ourselves but it might simply be used as a deception to fool other people.

[18 : 50] But it won't fool you and it won't fool God and who else matters? Nobody. Nobody else matters. It's only your business.

And so this thing is the reality that we as a parish have to come to grip with. This is the adventure of discipleship that we are to be engaged in.

You're the stewards of all that you possess. It belongs to you and God has provided it for you in some cases very amply but it's yours. He wants you to know that you're His.

That you belong to Him. He doesn't want yours. He wants you. That's what the New Testament lesson said to him.

Now tithing is to my mind nothing more than a way of teaching you to trust God. And if you've never tried to trust God in this way then it's recommended that you trust.

[20 : 08] In the Old Testament they took a tenth and they gave it first to the Lord. They didn't give it to him because he needed it. they had the scripture too that all things come of you and of your own that we give in you.

They knew that as well as we give. But it was them learning to trust God with something that was terribly important to them.

And so that's why we want this parish to engage in the tithing of our time and our talent and our treasure as an adventure and a deliberate experiment in Christian discipleship.

And the confident expectation that we have is that you will learn that God is to be trusted with all that you are and all that you have.

And that's all that it's about. that you will learn to trust and to learn in this simple and experimental method.

[21 : 25] And as you trust him more you will trust him with more of what you are and what you have. You see the great danger of our possession is that we can so easily be deceived by them.

Not only can they deceive us but we can use them to deceive others. We might even be bold enough to try and deceive God when we know that we can't.

Ultimately we can't deceive anybody. and if you take all this deception and blow it up like a big balloon so that it looks like something very impressive then for you it might be helpful to take on this kind of rule of faith of saying Lord I'm going to give you this portion of my wealth and this first portion of my time and this first portion of my talent and I'm going to give it to you in order that I might be free of deceiving myself.

In a sense tithing would then be the pin that you stick in to the balloon of your own potential for self-deception. We need that kind of reality.

You might say that practically it's not very easy to preach on this the same way that the interest rate boomed up over 20 percent completely because I can't even imagine what that means.

[23 : 18] It means something pretty dreadful. But every human instance must be in the light of that to hold on to what we have. But in fact it provides the very best background perhaps in which to say Lord this is yours to deal with it what you want.

And I know that we as a parish are not going to have a problem about money. That's not going to be our problem.

We're going to have problems about discipleship, about being obedient to Christ from the heart, problems of self-deception, problems of pretending something is true which is not.

One last picture. It comes from the early chapters of Genesis and it's two men who went to make an offering to God. One of them his offering was acceptable, one of them his offering wasn't acceptable.

If you read the story you can't help but get angry with God for accepting one offering and refusing the other. But if you read the story again you'll see that the two men involved understood what had happened.

[24 : 40] And one of them was so angry and God said to him, I know you're angry but you know what the problem is and if you want to sort it out you can't.

But he refused to sort it out. And in refusing to sort it out he cut himself off from God, he murdered his brother, he became an alien and a runaway, he ultimately alienated himself from nature and he became an alien to God.

And that's the story of Canaanite. The reason was that at the point of his relationship to God, he wanted to write the rules.

He wanted to maintain his own deceptiveness. He wouldn't recognize the truth of what he was doing. And at this very important level of our lives and our relationship to Jesus Christ whom we profess as Lord, is that your offering and my offering of thanksgiving to him should not be a form of self-deception.

It shouldn't be a form of hypocrisy. We're free to do what we want in response to the love that he's human. who are free to venture up upon this experiment in discipleship in which we happily say to God, this belongs to you.

[26 : 22] And I want you to show me what I'm to do. And I'm prepared to do that. That's what stewardship is all of us.

That's where the real adventure of discipleship begins. Let me pray. Our God, we are a people who have been endowed with treasures that would make even King David amazed.

we've been endowed with so much. And we want to be able to say with all our heart and with the same kind of humility that David has, all things come of you, O Lord, and of your own we give you.

we want to recognize that we are yours, and all that we have is your gift to us.

To be used not to protect ourselves from the reality of your kingdom, but to be used to build bridges into that kingdom for ourselves and for other things.

[27 : 47] They may come to know you and to worship you and to serve you in the fellowship of your church. Amen.