

FOCUS ON STEWARDSHIP 1

2 Corinthians 9:1-8, Luke 12:32-34

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai, Sunday 21 August 2016

[MW16-25]

The story is told by the chief accountant for one of the wealthiest men who ever lived - John D. Rockefeller, Sr. Someone asked the accountant one day, "How much did John D. leave? We know he was an immensely wealthy man." Without a moment's hesitation, the accountant answered, "Everything!"

How much did he leave? Everything!

- it's true, no matter who you are, 'you can't take it with you'
which makes even more important what you do with it in the here and now

In my experience of parish ministry

- I have found it vital to have a special time each year to focus on "Stewardship" this gives an opportunity to reflect, learn, pray, and consider
- how might each one of us be called to act, what might we be called to do and to make a personal response

Why? For a start this gives us something to aim at

- if you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time!
and we already have one target: our budget for this year
which we agreed to at the AGM
- and one thing we know for sure
is that the expenses will pretty much take care of themselves!
- it's the 'income' side we're focussing on
it doesn't grow on trees, it won't come from thin air
- this "Stewardship Focus" invites each one of us to consider:
"what can I do to help meet our budget target"

The pastor got up at the beginning of the huge stewardship rally, held his hands up for silence, and said, "Friends, I have a marvellous announcement to make about our building fund and our stewardship program for the coming year." He paused for the import of his opening remark to sink in. He then added with dramatic phrasing, "Friends, we have the money!" A buzz of excitement went through the congregation. He held up his hands for quiet once again. He finished, "Yes, we have all the money we need. Now all we have to do is give it!"

God's promise is that we have all we need to do God's work in this place

- our part is to release it to God's purposes

Another reason to have this special focus

- is to remember what we say in one of our offertory prayers: (NZPB p.420)
*All that is in the heavens and the earth is yours
and of your own we give you*
- all the good things we have are gifts from God
home, health, garden, books, abilities, money

We have an opportunity to remember and thank God for these gifts
- and to ensure that we are using these gifts in the way of God

A third reason is that if we did not make a special time
- perhaps we would not do it
perhaps we would not specifically review our giving to our church
- we have a chance to think about different ways of giving:
putting something in the offertory bowl each time you come to church
going on the envelope system and making a regular donation each week
or each month
using automatic payments
- we are invited to consider: is our giving planned, budgeted for
or is it more 'spontaneous' or even haphazard
and is that what we wish to continue ...

It is also an opportunity to reflect on what we are doing with our money
- and consider if we are doing the best we could with it
it has been said that your bank statement and credit card bill
are theological documents ...
- they indicate who or what you worship, what you consider most important

Having this 'special focus' both allows us and encourages us
- to look at our circumstances and our church's needs
and ask: what am I to give in light of this?

Of course, our church is not the only worthy call on our giving
- we live in a community, a nation, a world
this special focus allows us to consider
what God may be calling us to do in response

Sometimes we don't like to think or talk about money
- but the fact is that without it, we wouldn't be here
and will not stay here
- it is interesting to note that Jesus talked quite a lot about money

Jesus talked a great deal about money. Sixteen of the thirty-eight parables were concerned with how to handle money and possessions. In the Gospels, an amazing one out of 10 verses (288 in all) deal directly with the subject of money. The Bible offers 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 verses on faith, but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions.

Today then is kind of a gathering of thoughts and introduction to "stewardship"
- so what is "stewardship" for you?
what do you think "stewardship" is?
- take a minute or two to reflect for yourself

[space for reflection]

[Any thoughts on "stewardship"?]

My off-the-cuff definition is:

- 'doing the best we can with all we have'
which of course begs the question: what is the best we can do?
- another good reason to have this special focus
to help us work out what is the best we can do!

We have many, many good things that we enjoy in life

- and as we were reminded, like John D. Rockefeller, you can't take it with you
however it can be 'sent on ahead'
- ordinary stewardship is concerned with taking good care of things
and using them wisely
- perhaps the extra dimension of specifically *Christian* stewardship
is the focus on 'sending it on ahead'

As perhaps this story reveals:

A sailor, shipwrecked on a South Sea island, was seized by the natives, carried, shoulder-high to a rude throne and proclaimed king. He learned that according to custom a king ruled for a year. The idea appealed to the sailor until he began to wonder what had befallen previous kings. He learned that when a king's reign ended, he was banished to a lonely island where he starved. Knowing he had power of kingship for a year, the sailor began issuing orders. Carpenters were to make boats. Farmers were to go ahead to the island and plant crops. Builders were to erect a sturdy home. When his reign finished, he was exiled, not to a barren isle, but to a paradise of plenty.

This is Jesus' area of concern in our reading from Luke's gospel

- as one commentator writes:

What seems to begin as prudent advice on long-term investments turns out to be a radical challenge calling for the reorientation of one's whole life. The identification and location of one's "treasure" turns out to be a matter of one's total self. How one handles property turns out to be not peripheral, but a matter of saving or losing one's whole being.

How you handle 'property'

- is a matter of saving or losing your whole being

Jesus advises his hearers to store their "treasures" in heaven

- for that's the only place the treasure will be safe
yet Jesus doesn't spell out how people are to do this
- one writer says Jesus is leaving room for people's creative response
in their particular situation

So, how do you do that?

- how do you store treasure in heaven?
reflect on that for a moment, discuss it with those around you if you wish
- how do you, as an individual follower of Jesus, store treasure in heaven?
how do we as a church store treasure in heaven?

[space for thinking/discussion]

Any ideas, suggestions for storing our treasure in heaven?
[share thoughts, ideas etc.]

Jesus' second point in our gospel reading
- is that our heart will always be where our treasure is ...
what we spend the most time thinking about, or worrying about
what we put our best energy into
what we would miss most if it was no longer there ...
reveals what our treasure really is

Our 'treasure' is not just what we say it is
- our treasure is what we actually invest ourselves and our resources in

Having this 'special focus' gives us the opportunity
- to see if we can recognise what is most important to us
to see where our heart is
and to consider: is my heart in the place I want it to be?

That's probably enough thinking, reflecting, considering for one sermon!
- so to conclude, a story:

John Rascus put \$300 in the collection plate when it passed, and he said softly, "I'll see you in heaven." Those around him said, "Old John is getting senile. He says he is going to see that \$300 in heaven. He may meet his Maker over there, but he certainly won't meet his money."

Now, the church treasurer used some of that \$300 to pay the electric bill. He gave some of it to the preacher to buy gasoline. Some went to ministerial students, and some to the mission field.

Early one morning John Rascus died in his sleep. On that first Lord's Day in glory, he walked down the golden streets and a young fellow came up and said, "Thank you, brother John. I was cold and lonely and it was a dark night. I saw the lights of the church. Just to get out of the dark, I went in. While there, the darkness left my soul and I found Jesus." Another came to him saying, "The preacher came to the filling station. As I filled his tank, he told me about Jesus and I gave my heart to the Lord." Next John met a throng of people who said, "I want to thank you for those students you helped. They preached the gospel to my family, and we found the Lord." He next met those of strange tongues who said, "Thank you, brother, for sending us the gospel across the seas."

Finally old John came to Hallelujah Square and, turning to an angel, he said, "I feel sorry for you angels. You have never known what it is to be saved by the blood of Jesus, My Lord." John Rascus mused a moment, then added, "And you do not know what it is to transform the possessions of earth into the treasures of heaven."

"Sir," replied the angel, "all we do is just watch it from the streets of glory."

I think that's a wonderful image
- to think of angels watching
as we transform the possessions of earth into the treasures of heaven