

## STEWARDSHIP 1

Psalm 89:1-12a, Mark 12:38-44 [MW18-36]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai, Sunday 11 November 2018

The frugal Anglican walked into the house panting and almost completely exhausted. "What's wrong dear?" inquired his wife. "It's a great new idea I have to be a better steward of our resources," the man gasped. "I ran all the way home from the stewardship committee meeting behind the bus and saved \$3.50. "That wasn't very bright," replied his flustered wife. "Why didn't you run behind a taxi and save \$20?"

I've been playing some worship CDs in my car as I travel

- especially as I drive between Mangawhai and Wellsford
- on one of them is a song with a line that really struck me
- it kind of wormed its way into my thoughts and under my skin
- the song is "Can't Stop Talking" by Russell Fragar
- and the line: 'it didn't come cheap, but I got it for free'
- as a word and poetry person I noted the interplay of opposite words
- simple and very effective
- this is the whole verse:

*Can't stop talking 'bout everything He's done  
It's the best thing, happened since the world began  
It didn't come cheap but I got it for free  
It's the hope of glory, Christ in me*

"It didn't come cheap but I got it for free" [Slide 1]

- my life, everything, has been given to me as a gift
- a free gift

And it made me stop and think

- God our Creator invested himself in creation
- in the universe, the world, the place where we live
- the whole of creation is the gift of a loving God
- it came at a cost, yet it is freely given to us
- God is intimately involved in his creation
- in Genesis chapter 2, verse 7 we read how the Lord God
- formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*
- and the man became a living being*

Then there is the life we have

- and the most amazing thing about this life is "grace"
- we can do nothing to earn God's love
- we can do nothing that will stop God loving us
- each and every one of us is precious in God's sight
- I invite you be aware of the 'bigness' the absolute 'amazingness' of this
- if God had a fridge, your picture would be on it

Yet when we ignore God, when we act in uncaring ways

- when we sin, hurt others, hurt ourselves, hurt God
- we are able to be forgiven
- that gift is already there
- it didn't come cheap but we get it for free
- through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

Because of Jesus' offering of himself on the cross

- we have forgiveness of sins  
we have new hope, new beginnings, new life
- God's grace is a free gift  
make no mistake – it is not cheap, because it cost Jesus everything  
which he freely gave for me ... and you ... and us ... and everybody ...

The Pastor of a mining town was once approached by a man who said he would give anything to believe that God could forgive sins, “but I cannot believe that He will forgive me if I just turn to Him. It is too cheap.” The Pastor said to the man, “You were working in the mine today. How did you get out of the pit?” The man answered, “The way I usually do; I got into the cage and was pulled to the top.” “How much did you pay to come out of the pit?” “I didn't pay anything.” “Weren't you afraid to trust yourself to that cage? Was it not too cheap?” “Oh no!” the man replied, “it was cheap for me but it cost the company a lot of money to sink that shaft ...” The man saw the light, that it was the infinite price paid by the Son of God for our salvation, which comes to us by faith and not by anything we can do.

It didn't come cheap but I got it for free [Slide 2]

- for me this is right at the heart of “stewardship”

Stewardship is recognising the wonderful gifts and blessings we have been given

- it is necessary to regularly take the time to do this  
like we are doing now with our annual 'focus on stewardship'  
(and you can do it more often than this, but it should be at least once a year)
- an opportunity to pause and recognise all we have been blessed with  
all I have been blessed with
- to thank God our Creator, Heavenly Father, Protector, Redeemer  
as we heard in our first reading from Psalm 89:

*Our Lord, I will sing of your love forever.*

*Everyone yet to be born will hear me praise your faithfulness.*

*I will tell them, “God’s love can always be trusted,  
and his faithfulness lasts as long as the heavens.”*

*... You are Lord God All-Powerful! No one is as loving and faithful as you are.*

*You rule the roaring sea and calm its waves ...*

*... The heavens and the earth belong to you.*

*And so does the world with all its people because you created them and everything else.*

This is a biggie – something not to be taken for granted

- as that song line says  
just because it's free doesn't mean it's not worth lots
- so today we remind ourselves to pause, to give thanks  
take a moment to take stock and count a few blessings

Part two of this is my response

- I have been given the gift of life  
what am I doing with it???
- there's a saying:  
“your life is God's gift to you, what you do with it is your gift to God” [Slide 3]

I could not pay for this gift, I could not earn it

- that's not how it works  
in any case it's way, way, way out of my price range  
in fact it's infinitely priceless
- however it is a timely reminder for me to undertake an 'annual performance review'  
what am I giving to God of the "3 T's"?
- what am I giving to God of my Time, my Talent and my Treasure???
- remembering it didn't come cheap but I got it for free

A couple of weeks ago we heard the story of Bartimaeus

- he was a blind beggar who cried out to Jesus  
Jesus heard him and healed him
- Bartimaeus received the gift, the blessing, of sight - for free  
or was it ... ?
- do you recall what Bartimaeus did?  
he left behind his cloak, his most valuable possession  
in order to get to Jesus
- then, when he had received the gift of sight, he ...  
followed Jesus on the way

Most of us already have the gift of sight [Slide 4]

- we have had it, used it, enjoyed it all our lives  
and mostly probably pretty much taken it for granted  
until it started to wear out
- but sight is a gift, a blessing  
just one of so very many gifts and blessings we have
- we have so much to be thankful for  
so much respond with

During the week I read about a church in Chiangmai, Thailand:

A church of four hundred members where every member tithes. They receive a weekly wage of about two dollars, and their rice. Of this meagre existence each gives a tenth every week. Because of this they have done more for Christ in Thailand than any other church. They pay their own preacher and have sent two missionary families to spread the gospel in a community cut off from the outside world. They are intensely interested in all forms of Christian work, especially work for unfortunates of every kind; and their gifts for this kind of work are very large. They have not only accepted Christ, but, having found Him good, they are making Him known to others. Oh, by the way, this church of all tithers is also a church of all lepers – every person has leprosy.

It didn't come cheap but they got it for free – and look where that led

Here are some verses from Psalm 89 in a different version, from "The Message" [Slide 5]

*Your love, God, is my song, and I'll sing it!  
Your love has always been our lives' foundation,  
your fidelity has been the roof over our world ...*

*... You own the cosmos - you made everything in it,  
everything from atom to archangel.  
You positioned the North and South Poles;  
the mountains Tabor and Hermon sing duets to you.*

*With your well-muscled arm and your grip of steel—  
nobody trifles with you!  
The Right and Justice are the roots of your rule;  
Love and Truth are its fruits.  
Blessed are the people who know the passwords of praise,  
who shout on parade in the bright presence of God.  
Delighted, they dance all day long; they know  
who you are, what you do - they can't keep it quiet!*

Stewardship is recognising all we have been blessed with  
- and giving thanks to God by sharing these blessings  
using what we have in God's service

Here is something John Wesley wrote about stewardship: [Slide 6]  
When the Possessor of heaven and earth brought you into being and placed you in this world,  
He placed you here not as an owner but as a steward – as such He entrusted you for a season  
with goods of various kinds – but the sole property of these still rests in Him, nor can ever be  
alienated from Him. As you are not your own but His, such is likewise all you enjoy.

During this coming week  
- take some time, make the opportunity  
to consciously consider the gifts God has given you  
- thank God for them  
also, consider how you are using and will use your “3 T's” for God  
how will you give to God of your Time, your Talent and your Treasure???

[Slide 7]

A moment for reflection  
- then I will conclude in prayer

*Abundant God,  
you made us in your image  
and breathed in us your spirit of life  
that is both gift and response.  
Move us, we pray, to respond as we have received -  
abundantly, generously, and joyfully  
that our common ministry may ever bear witness to your unfailing grace.  
In the name of the Three in whom we are One,  
Amen.*