

## STEWARDSHIP 2

2 Corinthians 9:1-11, Matthew 6:31-33 [MW18-37]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai & Wellsford, Sunday 18 November 2018

It seems there was a strong man who travelled with a circus. One of his most impressive stunts was to take an orange and squeeze every last drop of juice out of it. Then he would offer one thousand dollars to anyone who could manage to squeeze as much as one additional drop from it. He went from town to town making his offer, but no one was able to win the thousand dollars from him. Then one day he came to a small country town and made his demonstration of juice-squeezing prowess and his challenge. A small, frail, elderly lady came forward and said she would like to take up the challenge. She took the crushed orange and proceeded to squeeze six more drops of juice from it. The strong man was amazed. He could hardly believe his eyes. He asked how was she able to do this? The elderly lady shrugged and said, "Oh, I'm the treasurer at the local Anglican church and I do this all the time."

This morning we continue our focus on "Stewardship"

- and on occasions such as this I feel there's an element of 'preaching to the choir' "preaching to the converted"
- because we are the people who are here week by week throughout the year supporting the work of our church by our regular presence our regular participation and our regular contributions
- so maybe we are the 'regulars' – and that's good because without dedicated regulars no church could survive

However it seems to me that precisely because of this 'regular' thing

- it is important to have a special time to step back and to consider the particular response to God that 'stewardship' involves

Just because it's regular and it's continuing

- doesn't mean it is supposed to carry on in the same way this is not something that is taken for granted
- so we take this opportunity to take stock, to consider

Last week I drew attention to the "3 T's" in the Christian life

- time, talents, treasure throughout the year in all sorts of ways we talk about how we may use our time and our talents in God's service
- at this time of year we talk about that other "T": treasure in view of who God is and what God has done for me what is my response in terms of my treasure – my money?

There will be no "hard sell"

- it is an opportunity, an invitation to listen to what our scriptures say, to listen to some comments then reflect, consider and make our response

There's a saying: "Give God what's right, not what's left"

- another clever saying, which as a 'wordsmith' I really appreciate it's also deep, thoughtful and true
- a reminder that when it comes to our giving to God it is not to be just what's left over not the scraps, not after everything else is done and accounted for

There was a knock at the door of the hut occupied by a missionary in Africa. Answering, the missionary found one of the local boys holding a large fish. The boy said, "Reverend, you have taught us about giving and about tithing – so here, please, I have brought you my tithe." As the missionary gratefully took the fish he asked, "If this is your tithe, where are the other nine fish?" At this the boy beamed and said, "Oh, they're still in the river. I'm going back to catch them now."

Giving to God and for God is to be a conscious decision

- we are to give God of our abundance  
for we all have an abundance of something

That saying says: "Give God what's right"

- fair enough, I totally agree  
however it seems to me no one else can tell you what's "right"
- perhaps there is a case for saying what is "wrong"  
not giving anything, not putting some effort in  
not thinking about this at all ... that's probably wrong
- however, whatever 'system'  
however you work out what is right for you, is right

For many people the 'rule of thumb' is tithing – giving ten percent

- it is a good guide and it works well for some  
I know people who tithe everything – all of their time, talent and treasure
- I also know people who give far, far more than ten percent

However this is not an area for judgement or finger pointing

- remember last week's gospel with Jesus and the widow in the temple ...  
there are no hard and fast rules
- my experience is that people generally know what's right when it comes to giving  
there is either a sense of peace  
or a gentle, niggling uneasiness, which can become a disturbing uncomfortableness  
that cannot be ignored and will not go away

Perhaps this incident gives a glimpse of how that works:

It happened one time after the vicar had made an appeal in church for a great and worthy cause, that a certain woman, a member of the church, came to him and handed him a cheque for \$50, asking at the same time if her gift was satisfactory. The vicar immediately replied, "If it represents you." There was a moment of soul-searching thought and she asked to have the cheque returned to her. She left with it and a day or two later she returned handing the vicar a cheque for \$500 and again asked the same question, "Is my gift satisfactory?" The vicar gave the same answer as before, "If it represents you." As before, a truth seemed to be driving deeply. After a few moments of hesitation she took back the cheque and left. Later in the week she came again with a cheque. This time it was for \$10,000. As she placed it in the vicar's hand, she said, "After earnest, prayerful thought, I have come to the conclusion that this gift does represent me and I am happy to give it."

Good old St Paul had a few guidelines when he wrote to Jesus' followers in Corinth

- although they were written for a particular situation  
of one group of Jesus' followers being generous  
and supporting another group who were finding things difficult
- these words have a universal application  
being applicable to all who love the Lord Jesus and seek to faithfully follow

This was our first reading from 2 Corinthians 9:1-11

- here's a quick recap from *The Message* translation:

*I want you to have all the time you need to make this offering in your own way.  
I don't want anything forced or hurried at the last minute*

*Remember: A stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop*

*I want each of you to take plenty of time to think it over,  
and make up your own mind what you will give.  
That will protect you against sob stories and arm-twisting.  
God loves it when the giver delights in the giving.*

*God will generously provide all you need.  
Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others ...*

Two things to keep in mind

- God deserves more than leftovers
- make the effort to discern what is right for yourself

Here's a true story I came across that I think puts all this in proper perspective:

One afternoon three children, two boys and a girl, entered a flower shop. They were about nine or ten years old, raggedly dressed, but at this moment well-scrubbed. One of the boys took off his cap and gazed around the store somewhat doubtfully, then came up to the person who owned the store and said, "Sir, we'd like something in yellow flowers."

There was something in their tense nervous manner that made the man think that this was a very special occasion. He showed them some inexpensive yellow spring flowers. The boy who was the spokesman for the group shook his head. "I think we'd like something better than that."

The man asked, "Do they have to be yellow?" The boy answered, "Yes, sir. You see, Mickey would like 'em better if they were yellow. He had a yellow sweater. I guess he'd like yellow better than any other colour."

The man asked, "Are they for his funeral?"

The boy nodded, suddenly choking up. The little girl was desperately struggling to keep back the tears. "She's his sister," the boy said. "He was a really good kid. A truck hit him while he was playing in the street." His lips were trembling now. The other boy entered the conversation. "Us kids in his block took up a collection. We got two dollars and thirty cents. Would roses cost an awful lot, sir -- yellow roses, I mean?"

The man smiled. "It just happens that I have some nice yellow roses here that I'm offering on special today for two dollars thirty a dozen." The man pointed to the flower case.

"Gee, those would be great! Yes, Mickey'd sure like those."

The man said, "I'll make up a nice spray with ferns and ribbons. Where do you want me to send them?" One of the boys responded, "Would it be all right, mister, if we took them with us? We'd kind of like to -- you know -- give 'em to Mickey ourselves. He'd like it better that way."

The florist fixed the spray of flowers and accepted the two dollars and thirty cents gravely and watched the youngsters trudge out of the store. And he felt within his heart the warm glow of the presence of God.

So I invite you to take a couple of moments

- to consider all this and your response  
there are no cards to fill out, no pledges to make
- I encourage you to come to some arrangement, you and God  
in regard to planned giving
- this is our church, our ministry  
we all have a responsibility, we all have a part to play

[silence]

Please join with me in praying the prayer at the bottom of p.3 in Pew News/Sheet

*Almighty God, we thank you for all the gifts You have given us:  
our lives, our loved ones, all that we have and all that we are.*

*Most of all, we thank You for Jesus, your Son and our Redeemer,  
who came among us to show us the way to eternal life.*

*Jesus was the perfect steward of your gifts,  
showing that complete trust in You is necessary,  
and that giving of self is a most important part of following Him.*

*May the offerings of our time, our talents, and our material resources  
be made in the same spirit of sacrifice that Jesus taught us by His life and death for us.  
Amen.*