

God the Giver Stewardship
20th Sunday after Pentecost Proper 23

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October 11, 2015

Mark 10:17-31

I can't believe that we are in October already and it's getting darker earlier, the year is going so fast. The kids are back in school, the leaves are changing and before we know, it will be Advent and a new church year. But before that happens we all know what comes before Advent, Stewardship and wouldn't you know it that today's reading is about a rich man, his money and possessions.

The rich man, I'm sure we all know someone that to us is rich, at least I do. They seem to have everything, the new house, the new car, the vacations, the kids in all the right colleges but is that what rich really means?

We know our man in the story is rich, and he thinks that just like he probably inherited a rich lifestyle from his father he can also inherit his eternal life from Jesus. He kneels in front of Jesus and may think that all Jesus has to say is the word and he will have eternal life and then he can go on his way. But Jesus asks him about the commandments and of course he says, "I have obeyed the commandments since my youth." To his shock and amazement Jesus says

something he can't handle. He tells the rich man to sell everything, give it to the poor, and if he does that he will receive his real treasure in heaven; and then he is to follow Jesus.

We see how he responds to what Jesus said by going away shocked and grieving. Would we do the same thing if Jesus asked that of us? Can you imagine right now going home, packing all that you we own, along with all our memories, our pictures, maybe a new flat screen TV and just taking them down to Goodwill and giving it all to the shelter, and then walking away and telling Jesus I am all yours and I will follow you.

No wonder Jesus said it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who has many worldly possessions to enter the kingdom of God. When I think of this I can't really see a camel trying to fit through a needle but I can imagine a circus elephant walking up to my front door and trying to squeeze through. He might get his trunk through and maybe his face but when it comes to those large cute Dumbo ears and that very wide belly. Jesus is telling us that it is that can be that hard to get to heaven if we have all those worldly possessions.

I don't think that Jesus is literally saying that if we are rich in possessions we can't get to heaven because God blesses us with His gifts, whether it is money,

or other riches in our lives but I believe Jesus is trying to tell us that even though we are rich we need to give ourselves away to become rich in Him.

The season of stewardship is filled with talk about money: what is needed, what we should do, what the church wants to accomplish, those we serve and the projects we must sustain, it is all of value. In order to communicate its importance, we have meetings, we make the conversation urgent, perhaps helping us feel our value about our offering. This year the Episcopal Network for Stewardship has a program this year called God the Giver which we will be using at St Aidan's. This week's insert is in the Bulletin.

John Vernon Oakes tells his story about tithing after his life had turned into a financial ruin. When he started sharing out of the small income he had every week he stopped worrying about his lack of money and his soul also started healing. John didn't give away all has but he has started giving it away through Planned Giving. You can read more of John's story in the Bulletin insert.

What matters to Jesus is not the size of the gift but the difference it makes in the life of the giver because they are giving from their heart. Just like John was giving and was changed we also can give from our heart because tithing is part of our spiritual responsibility.

We give because we like what the church is doing. We see our church live out as a witness of Christ in the world through our outreach programs and we respond generously. We want to contribute to the good work that the church does in the mission field.

We give because of what it affords us from the programs we have for our children, a place to belong, and a program we enjoy. We give because of what the church gives us back in return and we know that contributing keeps the church open for us and others. We know sharing supports the church and that our church works on building the Kingdom of God.

We give because of the theological understanding of stewardship. God has given generously to us and we must give generously back to God. We do not need to give up our riches literally but we are to give of ourselves and our resources to God as part of our faithfulness. In giving back to God we share our resources with others so that they might benefit: the other among us who might not normally benefit.

We can be the electricity, that flows through us with God's generosity and then be St Aidan's Beacon of Light to all who are seeking God in the world.

Last week we received our 2016 pledge commitment card and we should prayerfully consider all that God has given us. We need to prayerfully consider how the Holy Spirit is calling us to share God's abundance through St Aidan's.

Richard Rohr tells us that prayer is sitting in silence until it silences us, choosing gratitude until we are grateful and praising God until we ourselves are an act of praise.¹

The longer we remain in the embrace of unconditional love and mercy, the more deeply we are aware that this grace meets every need the world has. We are aware that it meets every need we have. We are able to give freely from our abundance, sharing that gift with others. Silence is a spiritual practice of relaxing into the stillness of God, noticing grace as a constant presence rather than as fleeting and random moment.

When we can sit with God in silence He can move us profoundly, we will want to give, we will want to give out of love, out of abundance, out of grace, and out of gratitude.

Let us pray,

Lord in this Stewardship season please give us the grace to reflect prayerfully and silently on our love for you and our neighbors.

Make us mindful of the many gifts you bestow on us and we ask that your Holy Spirit will inspire and direct us in our choice of giving back that which is truly yours.

Strengthen us, Lord, to meet this challenge according to your will through Jesus Christ our Lord who has given all that we may live.

Amen

1. [://www.trinitylc.org/page/show/243627-quotes-about-gratitude](http://www.trinitylc.org/page/show/243627-quotes-about-gratitude)