

Stewardship sermon. Fr.Hugh. St. George. 10/18/2008  
Pentecost 23. Pr.24

“Ascribe to the Lord the honor due his name...”

A priest received a phone call from the IRS.

The agent said, “I see here that a Mr. Alan Howard claimed a tax deduction of \$12,000 as a donation to the church.

Is that true? Did he in fact make that donation?”

Knowing it to be patently untrue, the priest replied,

“I don’t have the records in front of me, but I’ll check into it and I assure you that if he didn’t, he will.”

A couple of friends were having lunch and talking about their church. One said: “I don’t give any money to the Church, because I don’t understand why God doesn’t do something about the suffering and injustice in this world.  
- I’d really like to ask God about that one day.”

“So why don’t you ask him?” said his friend.

He thought a moment and said, “Because He’d probably put me on the spot and ask me the same question.”

One rector decided to let his new young assistant priest give the annual stewardship sermon. He asked him to come up with a catchy phrase for the stewardship campaign. The vestry wanted a slogan to put on T-shirt to give to everyone when they turned in their pledge card.

Stewardship Sunday came around.

The young priest got in the pulpit and looked around, feeling very pleased with his innovative idea.

Then he pulled out a T-shirt with its simple catchy slogan:

“I upped my pledge. Up yours!”

In the Psalm this morning we said a very familiar verse:

“Ascribe to the Lord the honor due His name. Bring offerings and come into His courts with thanksgiving.”

During this last year we have been able to welcome a good number of new members to St. George.

I like to get to meet the new members, and of course I always say to them:

“There is just one little thing we ask of our members.”

“What’s that?” they inquire innocently.

“You have to sell everything that you have and give it all to the poor.”

After they pick themselves up off the floor, I say,

“Just kidding!”

But Jesus did say those very words to a wealthy man!

Now, your vestry and I are more lenient than that.

We want to cut everyone a little slack.

We don’t ask for all your worldly goods.

We don’t ask for half of your worldly goods

We don’t even ask for the fifteen percent that many restaurants tack on to your bill, whether you thought the service was acceptable or not.

So when you think about it, the Scriptural recommendation of a tithe of ten per cent of your income sounds like we're all getting off lightly.

Why did Jesus ask that rich young man to sell everything he had and give it to the poor?

Because he knew that this man was possessed by his possessions and that he had made an idol out of money.

In fact Jesus spoke more about the importance of having a right relationship with money than about anything else. Twelve out of thirty-eight of his parables, almost one in three parables, have to do with how we relate to money.

If I were to ask:

“Who here does not want any more money?”

- I don't expect a lot of hands would go up.

Money is a big issue for almost everyone.

The general assumption is that financial prosperity equates to a good life.

Our whole economy is based on people wanting more, which was not a very good key principle, as it turns out.

The media is clearly obsessed with money.

Aside from the recent Wall Street alarm, the cable news shows regularly bombard us with just how many millions the latest top grossing movies are bringing in.

Bill Gates is often in the news, just because he is the richest man in the world.

People are fascinated with wealthy people.

But a quick look below the surface at the dysfunctional lives of the Gettys, the Hearsts, the Van de Bilt, the Kennedys and yes, I'm afraid some of the British Royal Family; along with the tragic lives of many overpaid movie stars, rock stars and athletes - clearly illustrates that great wealth does not automatically deliver happiness.

Jesus taught us that:

“The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.”  
He did not say, as he is often misquoted, that money is the root of all evil. It is the love of money to the exclusion of generosity and caring that is the problem.

Money is neutral, just an agreed currency of exchange.  
It's how we view it and how we use it that is the issue.

If we place such a high value on money that we put our trust in it, more than we put our trust in God, we end up making a god out of money.

The irony is that if you make money your god, it ends up plaguing you like the devil.

The key question is not how much money you have.

The question is - do you have your money,  
or does your money have you?

Money can buy luxuries, but it can't buy happiness.

Money can buy a house, but it can't buy a home.

Money can buy medicine, but it can't buy health.

Money can buy a new bed,

but it can't buy a good night's sleep.

Money can buy fashion, but it can't buy beauty.

Money can buy attention, but it can't buy love.

God gave us free choice, and we can choose whether to direct our focus primarily on fulfilling our wants; or, on fulfilling God's plan for our lives.

In the final analysis, if we have to give an account to God for every action and every word, we will surely have to give an account of our use of money.

Did we use money as a gift from God or as an end in itself?

Money is a wonderful and powerful source for good, when we exercise thoughtful, generous stewardship.

The truth is that everything that we have in this life that is good is a gift from God. Money is God's, not ours, and it has merely been entrusted to our stewardship.

“All things come of thee, O Lord,  
and of thine own have we given thee.”

A Baptist pastor told me of a conversation with a man from his church. The man was complaining:

“I know I pledged to the church that I would tithe ten per cent of my income. And when I was making \$30,000 that seemed all right with me.

But now that I'm making \$120,000, ten per cent seems like too much to give to the church.”

The Baptist preacher replied:

“Oh. That's all right. I understand.”

“You do?” The man breathed a sigh of relief.

“Oh yes, of course. I understand completely. Let's pray together right now that God will take this problem from you and restore your fortunes to their former level.”

Billy Graham said:

“If a person can get their attitude to money straight, it will start to straighten out every area of their life.”

Jesus said: “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things – meaning our material needs - shall be added unto you.”

God’s teaching addresses key issues about money.

That we not love money more than we love God;

That we give regularly to God’s work;

And that we give in proportion to what we have.

As a key church in The Villages, we can continue to expand and do more for people in need; and do more for our spiritual growth at this important time of life.

Our collective generosity molds the possibilities ahead of us.

I'm pleased to tell you that every member of the vestry has already made a generous pledge to support Christ's work through St. George in the coming year.

We are at a critical cross-road in the life of our parish. We can either worry ourselves silly about a financial crisis, get in a panic about money, and cut back our support for the church we love; Or, we can hold true to what we say we value, and put our money where our mouth is.

This world is not our permanent home. We are merely passing through and God has given us a chance to do something wonderful with our resources while we are here.

When we stop to contemplate the goodness of God;  
When we reflect on the love of Christ;  
When we expand our mind to contemplate the miracle of eternal life - we start to see things with a right perspective.

God looks at us, and He measures each of us by the size of our heart.

That's why Jesus taught:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust corrupts; and where thieves break in and steal.

But store up for yourselves treasure in Heaven where moth and rust do not corrupt and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Lets' each ask our self:

What does my heart tell me to do,  
to support our church for the year ahead?