

## STEWARDSHIP at ST Paul's and The Fell, Summer 2017.

Following the PCC's decision earlier this year a series of three sermons was delivered in June on the subject of Stewardship. Our Curate Andrew gave the first one and I spoke the second and third. I was asked to edit my contributions for the July magazine so that those unable to be part of the congregations in June could have the opportunity to read and reflect on this matter which is so central to our faith, and which we are called by God to regularly review.

If on reflection you feel that any of your contributions can be increased or amended please speak with either of our wardens, Christine Harrison or Mike Hill, a member of the Stewardship group, or a member of our PCC.

Julia Gilchrist

### **Stewardship Prayers**

Christ has no hands but our hands

To do His work today

He has no feet but our feet

To lead men in His way

He has no tongue but our tongue,

To tell men how He died.

He has no help but our help,

To bring men to His side.

O Lord help us we pray.



Loving God, we give thanks to you for all that you have given to us;

Help us to love you and others that we will want to give generously to support the work of your church in our own parish, this diocese, throughout the Church of England, and all over the world.

### **St Teresa of Avila**

God our Father, make us to think more of what we can give to life and less of what we can get out of it.

May we be mindful that we hold our gifts, our talents, our possessions, our life itself, in trust for you and the service of mankind.

Save us from thinking only of our own needs and desires; and help us to remember that it is more blessed to give than receive, according to the teaching of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.



### **Frank Colquhoun**

All generous God, you poured yourself out in creation, were totally spent in Christ's death on the cross, and continue to give yourself through the gift of your Holy Spirit to us.

Give us generous hearts; that, in response to your love, our lives may overflow in thanksgiving and generosity, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Teach us good Lord to serve thee as thou deservest

To give and not to count the cost

To fight and not to heed the wounds

To toil and not to seek for rest

To labour and not to ask for any reward

Save that of knowing that we do thy will

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.



## Ignatius of Loyola

Almighty God our Father, we belong to you  
All that we have comes from you  
Our family and friends  
Our health and life  
Our possessions and energy  
Our leisure and abilities.

Help us to share in the blessing of giving as well as the happiness of receiving.  
We ask this in the name of Jesus.

### A stewardship prayer of dedication

My church is composed of people like me – I help make it what it is.  
It will be friendly – if I am.  
Its pews will be filled – if I help fill them.  
It will do great work – if I work.  
It will make generous gifts – if I am a generous giver.  
It will bring other people into its worship and fellowship – if I invite and bring them in.  
It will be a church of love and faith - if I, who make it what it is, am filled with these same things.  
Therefore, with the help of God, I will dedicate myself to the task of being all the things that I want my church to be.



### Sermon : Stewardship 2 : St Paul's and Fell, 11 June 2017.

You may have read the page in the May and June church magazines or seen posters explaining that for the first three Sundays in June our sermons at the Fell and St Paul's will focus on the theme of Stewardship, and using our Treasures and Talents for God and our church. The aim being that in this quiet period of the Christian year, after the great festivals of Easter and Pentecost, we reflect on our personal faith and our individual roles and responsibilities in our church.

On the first Sunday in June, Pentecost Sunday, Andrew talked about the empowering of the disciples to go out into the world with the gospel after the gift of the Holy Spirit had been bestowed on them. Their Stewardship role was clarified as the early Christian Church was inaugurated, they were TRUSTEES of the gospel, MANAGERS of Christian MINISTRY, ADMINISTRATORS of the church, with the Holy Spirit inspiring, guiding and supporting them.

On this second Sunday in June I am going to talk more about Stewardship, specifically what it means theologically and practically for us as Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, then ask each one of you to re consider your commitment to God and what he asks you to do for Him here and now.

We must start at the beginning, God's creation of the world. As believers it is fundamental for us that our God, the omnipotent, omniscient, eternal Lord made everything. Genesis chapter 1 verse 1 : 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.' As originator, and creator God has absolute sovereignty and rights over everything, he owns all things, is responsible for all things sustains all things. As the Psalmist wrote in verse 1 of Psalm 24 : 'The earth is the Lords's and the fullness thereof, the world, and they that dwell therein...' And in Colossians chapter 1 verse 15 : 'for in Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created through him and for him...'

Accepting this doctrine helps us to understand and define our role in His creation. God has assigned mankind a specific role, to work for him on earth. We have a divinely given opportunity to serve Him. Our duty, our responsibility is to work with him as stewards; he is the owner, we are the trustees, the managers, the administrators and as such we are accountable to Him for what we do, how we do it and what outcomes we achieve.

In the Old Testament a steward is literally one who is 'over a house'. A good example is Joseph when a slave in Egypt as recorded in Genesis 43 : 19. The Ancient Egyptian word 'imyr', adapted into the Hebrew language as a title, is applied to the role Joseph rose to in Potiphar's house as one who ensures the efficient and effective running of all matters relating to a household.

In the New Testament two words are translated steward. Firstly, EPITROPOS, a manager, a foreman, a curator, one to whom a duty of care has been given, to whom an honour has been given. The Romans used it in the sense of a governor or procurator and as in Galatians 4 : 1 as a guardian and a trustee. Secondly , OIKONOMOS, meaning an administrator, a dispenser, a superintendent. This word is used to describe the function of delegated responsibility as in Jesus' parables of the labourers in the vineyard and the unjust steward.

Paul uses OIKONOMOUS often in his letters. He calls himself God's steward. To help his listeners and readers understand the

full significance of his role he describes his delegated duty to preach the gospel, and nurture those who have adopted the new Faith of Christianity. He writes of the divine trust placed in him by his master. In 1 Thessalonians 2:4 he says ‘approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel..’ and 1 Corinthians 9:17 he talks about being entrusted with a commission, then in Ephesians 3:2 of ‘the Stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you’.

So when we think of ourselves as stewards all these words should help us to understand our position in relation to God and our world. As His stewards we are his trustees, his ministers, his guardians, his superintendents, his managers, his curators, of the whole of creation, God’s world. Our duty and obligation extends to all creation to human beings, all living creatures, all plants and things that grow, the environment and all the infrastructure that supports life.

What a responsibility ! But of course, God does not leave us without the skills and abilities to cope nor does He leave us completely alone to muddle through. We all have been given treasures and talents to nurture and develop in ourselves in order to fulfil our given work to the glory of God and like for the disciples at Pentecost, we have the ever present Holy Spirit to inspire us, to guide us and support us.

So stewardship is in essence the way we perceive our world as Christians. At the heart is the recognition that all we are, and all we have is a gift from God. Thus Stewardship is our way of life. Everything we are, we have and we do we must consciously focus on God. Stewardship is not something confined to completing a standing order to donate to church, nor is it restricted to time given to cleaning our place of worship. Everything has to be integrated and mutually dependent as our faith determines our thoughts, actions and behaviours all day and every day, as believers we are consistently spiritual beings, to use the cliché : 24/7.

It has been suggested by one modern theologian that there are four principles of Biblical Stewardship that we need to understand.

**Firstly, OWNERSHIP.** As creator God owns us and everything in the world. We are managers, entrusted with caring for each other and our planet during our short time on earth. We are links in a very long chain, passing responsibility on from one generation to the next. Stewardship expresses our obedience to fulfil this mission. We have to commit ourselves and our possessions to God’s service. Deuteronomy 8:18 reminds us that ‘you should remember the Lord your God for it is he who gives you power to create wealth’.

**Secondly, RESPONSIBILITY.** Although God gives us ‘all things to richly enjoy’ nothing really belongs exclusively to us, we possess things temporarily, but should recall that we came into the world with nothing and will leave it similarly. Owners have rights, stewards have responsibilities. We manage what belongs to God because He has graciously entrusted us with the care and enjoyment of what He made and owns. But we have a duty to manage well, in accordance with His desires and purposes.

**Thirdly, ACCOUNTABILITY.** We are all stewards of the resources, abilities and opportunities God has bestowed on us. As explained in the parable of the Talents one day we will be summoned by our master and called to give an account of how we have managed our responsibilities and how we used the time, money, capabilities, information, wisdom, relationships and authority in our earthly lives.

And **fourthly, the PRINCIPLE of REWARD.** Colossians 3 : 23-24 tells us ‘ whatever your task work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men., knowing that from the Lord you will receive your inheritance, your reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving’. Any earthly rewards are short lived, fleeting and superficial, only God’s eternal reward is truly worth having.

So this morning I am asking you to consider a wider interpretation of stewardship. Too often it has a narrow connotation with financial considerations dominant. I am asking you to reflect on a deeper significance with obedient witness to God’s sovereignty at its core. Stewardship is the consecration of oneself and belongings to God’s service. As his trustees on earth we are managers of that which ultimately is His and we need to acknowledge that we are under His constant authority as we administer his affairs in the time and at the place allocated to us.

Stewardship should motivate Christian believers into action, to behave at all times and in all places, speaking, working and doing everything to manifest belief in Him and using everything we possess, our skills and attributes, our belongings, our time – indeed all our treasures and talents to His greater glory.

Next week we will move on to consider a more local perspective, about Stewardship here at the Fell and St Paul’s, in our town, our team, and our diocese. Reflect on ourselves and renew our commitment to do our best with what we have so that with God’s blessing and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit we may fulfil His mission in this place.

AMEN.

**Sermon : Stewardship 3 : St Paul’s and The Fell, Sunday 18 June 2017.**

(Introduction omitted)

Traditionally many British churches of various denominations organise Stewardship programmes every three or four years. St Paul’s and the Fell has followed a similar cycle, indeed some of you may recall Mike Hill leading a campaign some years ago, and more recently our ‘Giving in Grace’ agenda.

We have a Stewardship group which comprises John Peat our Stewardship secretary, Christine Harrison our church Treasurer, Carol Rhodes our Sacristan and me. Nick Ash was also one of us until his departure last September. At our meeting in Autumn last

year we considered launching a large scale Stewardship event in 2017 but after debate we agreed that without a Rector, and with all the demands of our reordering of our church buildings it was inappropriate. So we consulted with the PCC at our annual Away Day on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February when we all agreed that a series of sermons in June 2017 would aim to clarify understanding of Stewardship by revisiting the theological principles and then asking everyone to reflect on their spiritual and practical commitment to their faith, by considering the ways in which they fulfil their Christian duties of Stewardship in Grange in 2017.

This is the third and last sermon. In week one, it being Pentecost Sunday, Andrew spoke about the gift of God himself to us through the work and power of the Holy Spirit and how God has bestowed this on us by the grace and goodness of the Holy Spirit. Last Sunday I looked at how the Biblical evidence teaches us that Stewardship is a way of life for Christians and in essence how we, inspired, guided and supported by the Holy Spirit, manage God's world as trustees and guardians. He has entrusted his creation to us and we have a duty to use all the resources and gifts he has given us to protect, develop and nurture our world.

Today I would like each one of us to reflect on what we do, how we do it now and how we can further develop our contribution to God's work in this place, at this time. At one extreme this might mean for one of us that after prayerful contemplation at this stage in life my physical efforts need to be reduced but my time in prayer and financial inputs could increase. At another extreme it might be that through prayer and discussion the Holy Spirit has guided you to think about playing a more active role in our worship, God might suggest to you to put yourself forward for the 'called to serve' course. For some retaining the status quo will be appropriate, however, it is an important part of our Christian journeys that from time to time we re-evaluate our commitment to everything we do and give back to God, remembering, as in Peter 4:10 'Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received'.

Paul explains to us on many occasions that we are all individuals on whom the spirit has bestowed different gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12:7 he says 'to each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good'. Then in verse 27 he states that God wants each of us to develop, and use to his glory the gifts we have been given, whatever they may be : 'now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it, and God has appointed in his church first apostles then prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, healers, helpers and administrators..' the diversity of tasks was acknowledged by Paul and God in the Early Church, provided capable people to fulfil these roles. Today is no different, the capable people exist in the midst of us, and come forward when the time is right and they are inspired to do so.

It is usual for any consideration of Stewardship to focus on the treasures and talents of time, skills and money. We are blessed here that many people are retired or semi-retired and have the time to develop their role as disciples and stewards.

One church asked its congregation members to keep a time-diary for a week recording how many minutes they spent on 5 different things.

**Firstly**, minutes for God : in public worship, church services and private devotion.

**Secondly**, minutes for friends and family : face to face, sharing activities, telephone calls, emails and social media contact.

**Thirdly**, minutes for work : that is paid employment and/or essential tasks and chores to maintain a home and personal well-being.

**Fourthly**, minutes for rest and recreation: personal time to pursue hobbies and interests, and sleep.

**Fifthly**, minutes for church : rehearsing to sing in the choir, cleaning, working in the flower team, visiting sick or lonely people – including taking out home communions, preparing refreshments for events, running the library, manning the food bank, attending committees, writing articles for the magazine and many more.

The information compiled by individuals was private, not to be shared, but done as an exercise to highlight personal priorities and perhaps work out where there was an imbalance which could be addressed by some thoughtful tweaking. The church which piloted the exercise noted some significant changes. A number of people increased their time for personal prayer at home, and a number volunteered to join a list willing to make regular phone calls and/or visit the sick and /or lonely.

If when you reflect you decide that you are able to split up your time in a slightly different way and can offer more time to God's work, even if not on a regular basis, then there will be an opportunity for you and in His time He will show you what it is.

We are very fortunate here in having many highly talented folk, skilled and experienced individuals organising and sorting things for us. Sometimes this can be a negative fact as we sit back and let them get on with it, conscious that they do a far better job than we could do we are daunted by learning something new. That complacency can sometimes be challenged and God has been known to prod people out of their comfort zones !

At one church, because people were embarrassed and too reserved to talk about their own talents they were encouraged to talk with a friend, in a relaxed environment, who would point out what they saw as strengths or potential for skill development. The church saw it as important to focus on the talents and aptitudes of its members rather than a list of church needs. Again a number of people were prompted by the Holy Spirit to take on new challenges and learn additional skills.

Our financial commitment to our church is very personal, private, yet we have a Christian obligation to review our contributions. There are so many Old Testament references to show how money and possessions should be used not only to show gratitude to God for all his loving kindness and gifts, but also for the service of the people of God, in mission to all humanity and in the maintenance of world that is God's creation. **GENEROSITY** is one of the primary ways in which Christians evidence the fruit of the spirit at work in their lives. There are a multitude of possibilities and opportunities for us as stewards, though selecting which ministries, charities and organisations to support is often tricky as there are so many worthy and needy causes, as well as our own church.

But we cannot ignore or choose to overlook the fact that our church of St Paul's and the Fell needs us all to give generously if we are to continue doing God's work in this place. Sadly, we lose members of our congregation and their contributions cease, circumstances change for others so it has become even more important that those of us who have the God given resources review our offerings, and when and where possible we increase, even if only slightly, our financial giving.

Stewardship is indisputably a core doctrine and practice for believers. We have a spiritual and moral obligation to regularly review how we manage what God has entrusted to us, using all the resources – the treasures and talents, that he has bestowed on us.

I finish with the words of Paul from Romans 12 : 6-8 'Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them : if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; and he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.'

AMEN