

Stewardship

During the Lenten season our thoughts turn once again to the true meaning of giving, as exemplified by Christ on the cross. God's gift was great. God's only Son died to save us. How can we give back even a fraction of what God has given to us? All of our efforts, all of our gifts, seem to be nothing in the face of what God has done for us. Are we to feel helpless? Hopeless?

Of course not. God does not expect us to match the generosity or sacrifice of his gift. That would be impossible. But God does want us to learn about the true nature of giving, and we can do that by examining his gift to us.

God gave us his only Son whom God loved greatly. *True giving involves sacrifice.* We all know that it is easy to give when that which we give has no importance or value to us. God knows the real value of our gift because God knows the amount of sacrifice that is behind each gift. The rich person may give a large sum of money, but the gift represents no sacrifice to that person. God may better cherish the meager gift of a poor man or woman.

True giving must be unselfish. Christ died to redeem all people. He gave his life for us. Our motivation, why we give, must be Christian and unselfish. We do not give to enhance our self-image or to appear "holy" like the Pharisees.

Finally, true giving is ongoing. God's gifts to us are unending, continuous.

We should strive to become more God-like in our giving. During Lent, let us remember true giving involves sacrifice, it is unselfish and it is ongoing. 



Many folktales feature someone powerful asking for the impossible. "Bring me water in a container full of holes," or "Bring me the wind in a piece of paper." Everyone despairs until the main character arrives, carrying either a wet sponge (in the first case) or a fan (in the second). Then what had seemed impossible is shown to be quite simple.

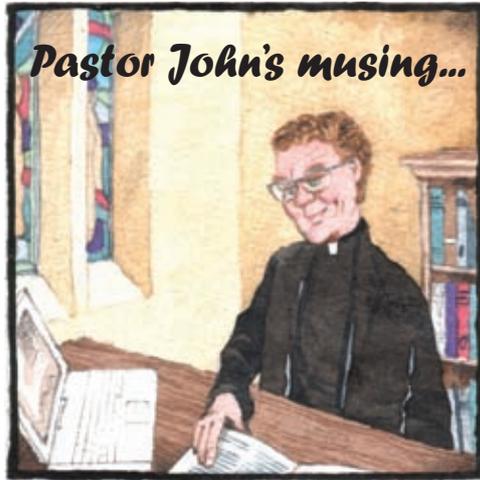
There is always a way

Sometimes true stewardship seems impossible. "How can I do more for my church? I'm so busy." "How can I give more money? I'm in debt as it is." "Share my talents? I'm no musician or artist." And it's true that if we continue to think that way, we won't do more. However, we are people raising the barriers, not God. God does not require us to do the impossible. Just as in the folktales, there is always a way to do what the Lord asks. It's up to us to find out how, through prayer, thought, and imagination. 

I speak of my time, but do so only with proper understanding. Time belongs to God. God places it in my charge and I have the responsibility of using all of it wisely and well. Time is one of the most important gifts given us by God. And we can do so by dedicating some part of it to some apostolic activity, organized within the framework of our own church.



Pastor John's musing...



Slowing my car to a stop as the traffic light turned red, I waited at the corner. A church's sign caught my eye. In large letters I read: "I'm here when you need me! - God." The light turned green. I continued driving. But my thoughts remained on the corner, contemplating the sign. Why did the message bother me?

My first irritation was with the word "here." Did they mean God could not be everywhere, but was confined to church buildings? Surely their understanding of God is bigger than that.

However, a second annoyance was more troublesome. It was the idea of God being our "errand runner," fairy godmother, or Santa Claus figure to whom we give requests and wish lists. It's an attitude that tells God, "Don't call me, I'll call you."

Now I knew what bothered me. The message could be misinterpreted! Our contact with God isn't only on an emergency basis when we're in a jam. God is in charge of the world. We are God's stewards, even though we have freedom to ignore this. Our time, talents, caring concern, and material blessings should willingly be given in service to God.

At the corner of our hearts, let's place a sign for God to read like the sign at the church's corner, this one also says: "I'm here when you need me." But it's our name and signature on this sign! 

She Gave Her All

A modern example of the widow's might shows the powerful faith surrounding a single coin.

In a Chinese school for blind children there was one girl who seemed too impaired to be taught anything. A lady visitor asked how she might help. The nurse said: "Give that poor little girl a piece of money. She has never possessed a coin of her own." So the child received a five-cent piece, to her great delight. Each day she planned some fresh way of spending it, sometimes keeping it herself, and sometimes giving it to the nurse to take care of for her

Now a meeting was to be held at Foochow for the Bible Society, and this child knew that it supplied the school with Chinese gospels in embossed type for the blind. She was too ill to go to the meeting, but she asked the nurse to take her five-cent piece and put it in the collection. The nurse said, "Half of it would be enough. It is all you have. Let me change it, and then you can give part and keep part." But the blind child insisted on giving all she had. She said, "No, I have never been able to give God anything before, I want to give it all."

May our offering of our material resources be made in the same spirit of sacrifice as this blind child's small, but powerful gift. 



All things come from God and are alive with his life. We belong to God and are dependent upon his creation and re-creation. We have been given God's property for a while to use in partnership with him. We are trustees.



The act of giving can be compared with throwing a stone into the water. The stone splashes into the water and sinks ... a thing done. Yet, the effect of that single act ripples out in circles around us, touching first one person and then another.

The need to share love and laughter and human fellowship is within all of us. We communicate our love with acts of giving and sharing. It is a simple matter to do this within the circle of family and friends and we do it as a matter of course. We don't often forget a birthday or anniversary or a Christmas present. But it is more difficult to give our time, our energy, and our possessions beyond this immediate circle.

We live in a world of need. Sometimes we can show our concern directly to those who have needed us in our communities. But some needs are too great or too complex or are in areas beyond our reach for any one person to meet. And so, we give some of our time, efforts, and money to the voluntary charitable organizations whose work interests us. But always a question nags at us. How much should we give? Are we giving to the right things? Should we be giving more to some and less to others? These are good questions that any good steward must answer.

But, there is nothing uniquely Christian in answering these questions.

Giving is a Christian's hang-up when

we ask, can we, through our giving, say God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that all men may know what it means to be truly human? Can we affirm, through our giving, that if any person be in Christ, he or she is recreated? 

What's in the Oven?

Pretend that you're in the kitchen. You've just closed the oven door when someone walks in and says, "What's in the oven?"

Do you answer, "It's a mixture of flour, baking powder, eggs," etc.? That's all it is at the moment. No, you'll just call it a cake. It won't be that for some time, but that won't change your answer. That's because you're taking time for granted.



Becoming something more

Christian giving is something like that. Donations of food, clothing, money, etc, are like the ingredients, and talents (such as musicianship or organizational ability) provide the "mixing." But time is what's needed to turn these things into the results of good stewardship. The time involved may be years, as in the construction of an addition to the church. It might be weeks, as in the preparation of a Lenten program. Then again, it might only be a moment ... a moment in which people commit to Christ because of some word of witness. 

Because our gifts and circumstances differ, we cannot all be missionaries or teachers. We cannot all witness to Christ in the professions, like Albert Schweitzer, the world renown humanitarian and author. But we can all give of our time and energy right where we are. This is where such gifts are most needed and most appreciated.



“We are given time by our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ for the seeds of almsgiving to fall upon our hearing. Again, Christ has given us the sower to imitate, who sowed his seed on good earth, and from it reaped a hundred-fold. For behold the message that is proclaimed from his hands. Behold the theater of almsgiving that has been gathered. For within have been called the lovers of God, and the lovers of honor and the lovers of the poor.”

...from a homily by St. John Chrysostom

Almsgiving Covers Many Things

The nationally known liturgist, Gabe Huck, writes that “Almsgiving is all the deeds we can do to remake the world, or, rather to restore it. It has to do with time and space, with money and goods. It is about the wholeness of things and people, the right relationship of those who dwell on earth to the earth and to each other. It aims to right the wrong distribution caused by greed or power or whatever else. It ignores neither the world nor what is in front of one’s face.” 

