

St Francis 9:30 P&P 11/2/18

Stewardship Sunday 2

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

Luke 12:13-21

It is now the clergy's turn to weigh in on Stewardship! You are welcome. I heard David preach last Sunday and have read Maureen's sermon too; I thought they were very good. But I am going to challenge them on one thing that they both said – that sermons on money & finance are boring! Friends – they are not!

I find money endlessly fascinating. I do. Don't tell me that I am the only one when walking by a sign for the next Euromillions jack pot doesn't have a daydream about what I'd do with it! Give it away to noble causes of course...

Money is not easily spoken of – whether you have a lot of it or very little. Yet it is a difficult subject to avoid as pounds and pence affect so many decisions in our everyday lives.

Think about it for a moment – you woke in a bed with pillows, sheets and duvet. Who paid for all that? Did you brush your teeth or take a shower? How is the water being paid for? I see we are all wearing clothes this morning – where did they come from? Even if we ourselves didn't pay for them – someone did. A person was also paid to make them. Have a coffee or tea or piece of toast? How did those come about? Who bought the cow that produced the milk?

I'm not sure that many of us here could walk into any store and buy whatever catches our attention without looking at the price. Money has a major influence on our lives and our thinking – whether we find it distasteful or not!

Think about that for a second – everything that we own, or do, or touch or eat and drink has been influenced by the transaction of money.

The church is not much different – money was needed to build this building, paint the walls, buy the chairs, the altar table and the silver. We still need money to buy the loo rolls, the wine and wafers we will consume during communion. Let's not forget the coffee and biccies

after the service - it all costs money! Even the things that are donated cost someone – something along the way.

This is part of why I think that money and what we do with it is fascinating – even in the mundane things like water bills and loo roll. It influences pretty much everything we do both directly and indirectly.

Money is serious business and it requires both thought and prayer. Fortunately, both the Bible and Jesus have a lot to say about money. Like both Maureen and David said last week, it is not money in and of itself that is the problem – it is our attitudes towards money and finance that Jesus is concerned with.

We have three examples in the readings this morning of attitudes (wrongly and rightly) towards money that we will explore.

In the Luke reading, we have the first two examples and we should keep in mind that none of the men in stories are bad or evil.

The first story deals with a family and an inheritance. The first man wants Jesus to take his side in a family dispute over an inheritance. His brother won't share with him and he probably felt entitled. Family feuds over money are the most difficult to reconcile.

My younger sister is a solicitor who specialises in wills and estates law in Canada. On her desk is a framed photograph of our Grandpa Lepp with one of his favourite sayings inscribed on it: 'you never truly know someone until you share an inheritance with them.' It is so true!

But Jesus seems to bypass his request – there is probably more going on and Jesus decides not to be the judge. Maybe Jesus detected ulterior motives behind the request.

Instead, Jesus tells them to 'Be on guard against all kind of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.' This is directed at both brothers.

'Life' here does not mean biological life – which can be measured – how old you are, how much you weigh, sleep, eat drink. It also doesn't mean the 'psychological' life of values and relationships. The word 'life' used here refers to the life offered to humanity in the call to follow Jesus though which we live in a personal relationship with the Father. God's life! This is the life that we are meant to live.

Jesus is saying there is a life more important than a life of stuff. There is something more. God's life of abundance that cannot be reduced or measured or satisfied by stuff.

The second man, who is not a real person – Jesus creates him as an example for the parable he tells the brothers. Let's call him Barney the Barn Builder. Barney has money and riches. He has got some stuff! This is where his confidence is.

But this is a false confidence. Barney's prosperity has nothing to do with him. It is the ground – the land. He is rich as a consequence of the productivity of the land. This is a gift – an inheritance.

Barney cannot seem to recognize this – we see this in his inner monologue – 'I will, my barns, my grain, I'll do, myself.' The inner monologue also tells us something – he was talking to himself – which means that he was alone. He had no one to talk to, to share with. Had his wealth isolated him?

Now Barney had some good plans – planning for the future and was going to enjoy himself. Again, these are not bad things to do. Barney was not wicked or unjust. He was a good planner! But in all of this – he had forgotten God.

Pride comes in many forms, but the worst form is to think that we don't need God. The man doesn't acknowledge the source of his blessings. This is why he was called a fool. There are only 2 occasions when Jesus calls someone a fool in Luke – both times the person has confused temporary earthly riches with eternal divine realities.

Barney is an example of what it is to gather for himself in order to serve himself. This guy lived on bread alone – all his hope was in things. And what happens? Barney's life is demanded from him that night. He died. Leaving behind all the barns and grains and money. To whom?

None of these three men (the 2 brothers and Barney) were rich toward God. That was where they found themselves in the wrong.

I took a Christian-based money management course a few years ago, the leader said something that has stuck with me. He said 'your bank statement is the most honest document you have about yourself. It tells of how you spend not only your money but your time. If you want to know what your priorities are – look at your bank statement'.

The most honest document you have about yourself. Wow!

This is also true of the church. By looking at how a church talks about money and uses its financial resources tells you a lot about its priorities.

The third example of money and finance is found in Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church. They are expecting some guests to come from Macedonia along with Paul as big things are happening in the churches – the Good News is being spread, people are becoming Christians and the church is growing.

The Corinthians have promised a 'bountiful gift' and Paul is writing to remind them to get ready. Paul wants the Corinthians to give generously but also cheerfully – without reluctance and to avoid embarrassment – this is partly why we spread Stewardship out over a few weeks. To make time for planning on your part – you are not asked to give reluctantly or under any compulsion.

We have seen that money can damage relationships and can lead to resentment and mistrust. We need to be wise and planned in our money and finance – but it shouldn't control us. Back to our bank statements and what they say about us!

We also need to balance this as we have a duty as Christians to support the work of the Church and the building of the kingdom. There are consequences – reaping sparingly or generously – this also includes our attitudes. I have never met a generous person who is miserable!

Here's the thing – you can't out give God. He will take whatever you give and multiply it! He provides every blessing in abundance in every good work. He gives to us so we can give away to others and always have enough.

God loves a cheerful giver! We have a lot to be cheerful about this year in the parish!

We have managed to keep good control on our finances in recent years. Duke, our wonderful treasurer usually manages to balance the books.

However, last year we didn't get as much income as we had budgeted for – down by about £10,000. The PCC has done an excellent job at

looking at the finances and have trimmed as much as we can for 2018.

We are not in immediate danger of going broke but we also want to maintain the commitments, the promises we have made before digging into the reserves.

There are exciting events and plans coming up in the next few years – there is a lot of need in our community that the church is ideally placed to do. We are lucky in this parish to have two full-time priests, a Curate and three churches. But this all costs money! We get income from hall rentals at all three churches and by claiming Gift Aid on donations of current tax-payers but the majority of our income comes from regular stewardship donations.

Whichever way we give to the church, by cash, envelopes or bankers order, it's good to recognise this moment in the service as the point of connection between that financial transaction and our faith and worship.

Why – because we give money to those causes or activities that we believe in or have a connection to. Think about for a moment those charities that you support. Why do you?

I know for myself that there are causes I support monthly that are close to my heart for various reasons. Likewise, when we give to the church we are saying something about our commitment to it. Back to your bank statement and your priorities.

The other secret about the church is that unlike other charities – it is only Christians, it us us, who give money to support the church. Lots of people will give money to cat homes, donkey refuges and little kids with cancer. But it is only Christians who regularly donate to the church.

So dear friends I encourage you to think about your relationship to money, pray about it, make a plan and then give cheerfully, graciously knowing that God's abundance will provide all that you need.

AMEN.