

Stewardship 2: Vision. SJC 9th June 2024

1 Sam. 8:4-11, 16-20 / 2 Cor. 5:6-17 / Mk. 3:20-end

My first parish was a small church in a fairly poor part of north London. Sunday attendance was typically 30-40 people. Most people were retired, unemployed, or in low-wage work, although they gave faithfully from what they had. Our annual income when I arrived was 14,000, and our diocesan apportionment – what we paid to the diocese – was 12,000. That left us 2,000 to do everything else. So early on I asked, “Did my predecessor teach about giving at all?” “Yes, he did” I was told. “What kind of things would he say?” I asked. “Well, sometimes he would stand up and say, ‘The gas bill has come in and we haven’t got any money to pay it. So please dig deep when the offering plate goes around, otherwise we will be shivering all winter.’ And I put my head in my hands. That’s not teaching about giving.

My next parish doubled in size during the years I was incumbent. But our giving quadrupled. And from those two parishes, I learned a lot about giving and how to help a congregation grow into generosity.

One thing I learned I shared with you last week. Giving, or financial stewardship is a part of discipleship. All of us who are disciples of Jesus are called to give as faithfully and generously as we can in response to what God has given us. For some, that will be a little. For others, it will be a lot. That doesn’t matter. What matters is that we learn discipleship in our use of money.

The second thing I learned I want to share with you today. People may give to the church because they love the church, and they know they ought to. But people will give generously because they have been captured by a vision, a glimpse of some possible future that is worth working and praying and giving for. I am convinced that money follows vision and that oftentimes when the church has no money often it’s because there is no clear vision.

Paul says in our epistle reading today, “We walk by faith, and not by sight.”

Let me put it another way. We disciples of Jesus live for things we cannot see with our eyes just yet. The kingdom of God, the setting right of all things, the new heaven and the new earth,

we don't yet see them with our eyes. But some of us have caught a glimpse of those things with the eyes of our hearts, and that glimpse is enough to keep us working and praying and giving to see them come about.

We walk by faith and not by sight.

You have heard me cast a vision of a Cathedral fit for the city of Toronto, a hub for the arts, a place where all cultures are affirmed and celebrated, a worshipping community in which people discover and develop faith in Christ through the beauty of our liturgy and our music. I long for a Cathedral that is genuinely good news for our city, a place for all ages, a home for all those who would seek Christ, a community in which lives are changed.

So let me unpack for a few minutes how the things I am asking you to give towards help that vision to come true. You can read all about these things in the brochure you received on your way in today. And if you're joining online, you can find this material on our website, or you can email or phone to ask us to send one to you. Or you can pick one up next Sunday or during the week.

There are four buckets of things which we want to do over the next year or so if funds permit.

The first is **Extending Our Outreach**. The Cathedral exists to be a place of good news where real needs are met and real opportunities are created. So, we are asking for \$140K, first to create a Community Children's Choir to engage young people with the gift of music. Many of you know the benefits of that from your own experience. We will start with some open sing-in sessions for any interested children, and then form a choir with those who have some commitment and ability. This choir will sing here on occasion, and eventually feed through to us having child choristers in the Cathedral Choir. Additionally, we want to put an extra \$10K into our Friday Drop-In and foot care clinic to support that work. We want to give \$10K to our refugee committee which will support the living costs of a family new to Canada for around 6 months. And lastly, we will improve our messaging internally and externally through a new website and new communication strategy. This all totals \$140K and is one of the largest buckets.

Second, we want to **build our ministry resources** to strengthen our delivery around discipleship, planning, and pastoral care. Perhaps the most important piece here is to tell you that when Canon Beth concludes her present appointment later this year as our Interim Associate Priest, we will appoint a Canon Missioner, a full-time experienced priest who will lead our efforts on discipleship and develop small group programmes including some for people exploring faith for the first time. They will engage with the institutions in our community and help us develop a programme for arts and culture. They will help us to implement the Season of Spiritual Renewal and grow in depth of relationship with Christ. To fund this along with other extensions of staff hours we seek to raise \$120K.

Thirdly we want to **enhance our music** by spending \$15K on funding immediate and necessary repairs to the organ to ensure performance until a larger refurbishment in the future. You will agree with me, I think, that our music is one of the chief glories of this place. But it is also expensive and needs proper investment year in, and year out. This 15K won't secure the organ indefinitely, but it should ensure it doesn't fall over before we are able to tackle very costly longer-term work in the future.

Our fourth bucket is called **Enabling Our Ministry** and involves an investment of 150K in building the margin we need to run the ministries of the Cathedral in a sustainable way while creating the capacity to respond to new opportunities as they emerge. If that sounds slightly generic, or a bit of a catch-all, that's because there are quite a number of things which would fall into this section. But cumulatively they would put the Cathedral on a firmer footing as we seek to respond to the opportunities God gives us in the future.

All of this totals \$425,000 new money this year, and \$390,000 every year in the future to keep it up. But I believe it is possible as we are gripped by a vision of what God wants to do here. In fact, I am sure it is, because over one-quarter of it has already been pledged and we are only on week 2 of 4.

So imagine with me.

Dozens of children in our neighbourhood coming into this place to sing, to be introduced to the church, and over time perhaps to the faith that inspires us.

Groups – in person and online - for each of us to explore our faith more deeply, wherever we might be on our spiritual journey right now.

Our social outreach programmes supported in the wonderful work they do with vulnerable people.

And the resources to respond to new opportunities as they arise.

That's what I am asking for your help with. It's not the end of our vision journey. But it's a pretty good start.

Let me end with a couple of thoughts from our Gospel reading. It's quite a hard passage, with Jesus teaching about the devil and spiritual warfare and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and some harsh-sounding words about his earthly family too. But let me pull out two things.

First, verse 24. "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand." We know this is true. To put it positively, if we want to move forward as the people of God, we need to do it in unity. That means loving each other, praying for each other, and working to keep relationships right as far as it rests with us. It means working together for a shared vision. And when we give to this vision, we say something powerful about our unity. We say, "I'm in. I want to play my part in seeing this vision come about." The more of us who do this, the more likely it is to happen. That's why I say to you, even if you can only contribute a little, it matters that you do. You're nailing your colours to the mast, and that's important.

Second, verse 35. "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." If this vision, these priorities, are an expression of our calling to do the will of God – and I believe they are – then when we commit ourselves to them, Jesus says, "You're not just my servants or friends or disciples even – you are my family." That is an amazing thing, to be invited into the family of Jesus.

So, let's commit ourselves to this vision. Let's play our part, in our prayer and in our action, and in our giving. Let's guard our unity and move forward together, as the family of Jesus. And next week I'll say more about this.