

Stewardship 4: Cheerfulness. SJC 23rd June 2024

1 Sam. 17:32-49 / 2 Cor. 9:1-10 / Mk. 4:35-41

We come now to the last of our four homilies on stewardship. If you haven't heard the others, they are on YouTube, and my texts will be on our website later this week if you'd like to read them. You have also hopefully had the opportunity to collect and read our stewardship brochure. And today I am going to be asking you to think and pray about your response and to bring or send your response form back to us as soon as you can.

But I want to begin by addressing a question that a number of people have been raising, and it's to do with outreach. The question is, why are we only asking for \$10,000 each for our Drop-In and our refugee committee? Surely those needs are so great that we should be raising more than that for them? Or are we more concerned about building up the Cathedral than we are about serving the real needs of our community?

Let me say three things.

First, the Children's Community Choir, for which we are trying to raise \$100,000, *does* deal with real needs in our community. We have children living in small apartments in this densely populated area of Toronto, most of them going to schools where music tuition has been stripped back to almost nothing. We want to offer them the gift of making music with others and a beautiful space to do it in, with free professional tuition. Not only is music a wonderful gift in itself, but singing in a choir teaches respect, discipline, and teamwork – skills which are vital to make success in life. This is a really important contribution to our community and its future.

Second, the stewardship campaign is raising *new* money – but we are *already* investing in those other outreach projects. For example, we already spend over \$100,000 per year on our Drop-In. The \$10K we are raising in this campaign is in addition to that, not instead. It's not the funding for the project, but a top-up to allow them to do that little bit more.

And third, this is just the *beginning* of our vision, not the end. We will do more. I want us to do more. But we can't do everything all at once. So, we are raising additional funds now for

our two existing outreach projects, and starting a third, which we will also fund properly from the outset. There is more we could do, and over time we will. Not just on our own but in partnership with others who also want to serve the needs of our city. But we will also make choices and invest our resources to do a small number of things as well as we can.

Let's turn to our text from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. You may remember that one of the themes of the letter is the collection which Paul is organizing for the Christians in Jerusalem. Paul will soon be on his way to collect the Corinthian contribution. But having told others just how eager the Corinthians are to give; he thinks it might be smart to send this letter ahead together with some people who can make sure the collection is ready. "Otherwise", he says, "if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated – to say nothing of you." Paul is confident that the Christians in Corinth will do as they have said, but he is not above sending an advance party just to be sure.

And here is the message which the advance party will be carrying. "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." No guilt trip. No manipulation. But an invitation to give joyfully, generously, and freely.

The First Nations translation, from which we heard the Gospel read earlier, puts it this way.

"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give. You should not feel forced to give out of guilt because someone is shaming you for not giving. For the Great Spirit loves it when people give with glad hearts."

This is very much what I have been trying to say over these four weeks. No guilt. No shame. But glad hearts as we give what we have decided to give.

People ask different questions about this. Like, how to decide, when there are so many needs in the world, so many good causes, or when we have relatives who need our support? I can't tell you where that balance lies. I can tell you, as others have said to me, that there are very many people who will give to museums or hospitals or universities, and just us who will give to the Church. I can tell you what the Church of England teaches, which is that we should

give 5% of our income to the Church and 5% to other charities. I can tell you what I have tried to do over the years, which is to give around 10% to the Church and smaller amounts to other causes on top. But I can't tell you where that balance should be for you.

What I can do is to talk about gladness. Paul says, "The Great Spirit loves it when people give with glad hearts." Giving makes you glad. Think about it. During this month I have had people say to me, "You know, when I made a generous gift, a gift that stretched me, that challenged me, well, it felt good. I felt good." Glad hearts.

So, I am urging you to respond to this season as generously as you can, yes because the Cathedral needs it and our vision requires it, yes because Jesus talks about money more than anything else, yes because I want you to sign up to go on this journey together, but also for this reason. It feels good to give. Generosity makes you happy. Glad hearts.

I'm drawing this season to a close now. I want to ask that if you haven't done so, you would take a brochure home, that you would pray about it and think about it, and that you would use the response card which is tucked away inside it to tell us what you plan to do. I want to ask that you would take a step, as I said last week.

If you don't give at all, then start. Maybe just give what you earn in a single hour of the working week.

If you give occasionally, start giving regularly. Move onto pre-authorized giving, so we know your gift is coming every week or every month.

If you haven't left anything to the church in your will, then consider doing that.

If you are already giving regularly, ask yourself if you could be more generous – 5%, 10%, even more.

If you are in a position to, consider a one-time gift towards this vision. Help us make it happen. Nail your colours to the mast.

Do it because you know this is what Jesus calls us to.

Do it because you care about this place and the vision God is giving us.

Do it because God has been good to you.

Do it to feel good.

And my promise to you is that we will manage your gift as well as we possibly can, as well as you would want us to.

Let me end on a personal note.

Just six months ago, Jacqui and I were celebrating Christmas in our home in South London with family and friends. Just a couple of weeks later, we put lots of our possessions in storage, said goodbye to our family, welcomed tenants into our home, and got on a plane to come here and begin a new adventure. We didn't really know anybody. We didn't really know how it would go. We did know God was calling us, and we were excited to be part of what God was doing here in Toronto. So we responded to God's invitation. And here we are.

The call isn't just for Jacqui and I. The invitation to a new adventure with God is for all of us. God is taking us somewhere. Together. As a community. We don't see the whole journey. But we do see the first steps. So I am asking you. Will you join us? Nail your colours to the mast. Commit. Pray. Serve. And give according to your means. Feel good about it – remember, glad hearts. And let's see what God has in store for us, together.

Amen.