

Sunday 19 October 2025

18 after Trinity – Stewardship Sunday

Proverbs 3. 5-12; 1 Corinthians 3. 1-4; Mark 12. 41-44

If you make a gift to someone, you would quite like to be thanked for it, wouldn't you ? It doesn't have to be an effusive six-page letter, but just an acknowledgement of the gift goes down rather well. If you receive a gift, then likewise you would send a grateful note of thanks. I'm sure you are all very well brought up and would do just that. But if you hear nothing from the person you have sent a gift to, you start to wonder why you haven't heard from them, and if it was posted whether they even received it.

The reason why today is important (and not just today) is that it serves to remind us (in the readings and in our lives) of the extraordinary gifts God has showered upon humankind. The readings chosen for today demonstrate this in different ways: in the Book of Proverbs we are encouraged to "honour the Lord with our substance and with the first fruits of all our produce"; in Paul's first letter to the people of Corinth he is warning them not to descend into jealousy and quarrelling, because that will reduce the effect of their contribution to the community; finally in the Gospel today Jesus through Mark is telling us about the widow's mite, which is huge in proportion to what income she has available, in contrast to the Jewish lawyers who are well off but are relatively speaking not so generous.

However the greatest gift of all which God has given us is of course Jesus Christ himself, who came among us as both man and God, in circumstances of great humility. He came to teach us how God wanted us to lead our lives, both in relation to himself and to our neighbours, wherever they may be. Put in another way, he came to remind us that he would also like to be thanked from time to time, and that there are all sorts of ways of doing that.

The designated theme for today is Stewardship; or, we might say it could be called Thankfulness Sunday, because that is really what lies behind it. I can already see some rolling of the eyes in the congregation: “oh dear, he is going to talk about money”. Well, I am but that is by no means all that thankfulness entails.

We humans have so many talents to offer God and neighbour (what the author of Proverbs calls the “first fruits of all our produce”); in comparison to animals we are intelligent, creative, insightful, compassionate, versatile and many other things which distinguish us from everything else in creation. We can offer these God-given gifts back to him through the communities where we live, including the Church, by spreading the load as widely as possible. We have prepared a fairly comprehensive list which was handed to you with the service sheet. It covers the areas of our church community for which voluntary assistance is needed: a concert coordinator for this building, a member of the social/ events committee, volunteers for our church shop, an accountant to assist the treasurer, someone to help with caring for the churchyard, to assist in working with children, readers and praying the intercessions, male choristers, and last but by no means least, helpers on the coffee rota in the hall after the Sunday services. That seems rather a long list, but we really short of volunteers in every case. Many hands make light work !

And then there is your favourite topic: money ! We earn money by using the talents and skills which God has given us, in various forms. It is only right that we should return some of it to him through the Church, which has developed a simple formula for giving, namely 10% of our net income for all our charitable giving, including the Church, and half of it - 5% - for the Church itself. Of course, over time, our circumstances can change, either for the better or for the worse. I was in a discussion group in our previous parish, when we were talking about what we would do if we fell on hard times, as many do. A member of the group said that charitable giving would be the first thing to go if that happened to him, which

produced a rather shocked reaction from the other members. I can remember him saying that you have to think of No 1 first. Well obviously you do, in extremis, but surely not to the detriment of all charitable giving. The widow giving the mite is a good example. It is a matter for each individual person to decide, and we can all assess how we are doing by looking at the level of our giving year by year. Stewardship is all about that as well.

In terms of giving money to St Mary's there are a number of ways this can be done: either through the Parish Giving Scheme (PGS), or the well-known Envelope scheme, or by using the card reader at the back of church. Incidental cash payments are really not the ideal method, because it is impossible to budget accurately for the future when you don't know when the money is coming in. The PGS is organised centrally and works well; it also builds in an annual inflation increase, which we are all affected by.

Let's remember: all of the above is more than just a nice thing to do, it is in recognition of the debt we owe to God for creating us, for putting us here on earth, and above all for sending his son to us. It is a way of taking ownership of our common undertaking: without God we would not be here, and without Jesus Christ we would not be sitting here in this church. So let's not disappoint him or let him down, but let's thank him for providing us with the means to be thankful.

PBW – 17.10.2025