

Rector's Charge to Vestry – 27-2-11

In my charge today I want to talk about gifts – of the many ways in which we receive gifts and of the many ways we can give back.

The readings I have chosen for today are examples of how gifts were given both to Jesus himself and to the early church – how they were used for those in need and for spreading the glorious Gospel message.

The first reading from Acts tells us of the action of the first converts and how they lived and worked as a community.

We are told that about 3,000 were brought into this new way as followers of Jesus and how they lived out their lives.

First, they *'devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers'*,

We promise that in our baptismal vows and we pretty much practice that in our church today.

Then comes this weird way in which they lived – almost like a commune in the 60's

They *'had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need'*.

This is very much an image of a local family church looking after each other – you and me against the world.

The second lesson comes from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians and is set in the growing **early** church where there was a realization of the need of finances to spread the gospel and **what a story of generosity!**

What strikes me is that the gifts were not coming from those who were rich but from the poor.

In spite of being in what Paul calls ‘*extreme poverty*’, they voluntary gave according to their means.

We learn in the next chapter that their giving did not stop at their local community but that they had promised to send money to the Jerusalem church.

It was also said to be a ‘*voluntary gift and not extortion*’.

He says:

*‘The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.’*

This is a recognition by the congregation in Corinth that the Church is much more than their local community.

Then in the **Gospel** we hear that wonderful, familiar story of the feeding of the five thousand.

We hear the desperation in the disciples’ voice when they tell Jesus that they cannot possibly feed all these people with a mere five loaves and two small fish.

You can almost imagine Jesus saying to them, ‘**O you of little faith**’.

In Jesus’ hands and with his blessing, five thousand were fed.

Today, as we have our annual vestry you will hear a lot about giving – giving of time – giving of talents and giving of money.

**First there is the gift of time.**

Recently Jacquie came to us with a concern over persecuted Christians around the world.

She saw how much we take for granted the freedom to gather on a Sunday for worship where many around the world are ostracised for doing this and even killed – churches are burnt down with many worshipping – individuals are imprisoned for their faith.

How they wish they could have the freedom we have to come out each Sunday and worship God in public without fear.

About the same time I read an article in the Toronto Star by Carol Goar entitled '*Millions long for rights we squander*'.

In it, she talks about our poor attendance at the polls where 40% don't even bother to vote when people in Egypt, and now Libya, are losing their lives in search of such a privilege

Do we feel the same way about giving our time each Sunday to attending worship or do we take this privilege for granted also.

Probably of those who come to church these days, only 40% come each week.

Out of that recognition, Jacquie will be presenting a motion later in the vestry that we attend regularly for those who do not have that freedom.

This is about how we give of our time to the wider world.

Then there is the gift of talents.

Each year as vestry comes around, there is a frantic search to see who will stand in what position.

Even more often as I prepare the roster, I wonder who else can help in the liturgy.

I encourage you to become more involved here at St. Theodore's in the business and liturgical life of this your local parish.

For anyone who feels called to be an assistant warden, or a member of the advisory board, I have, as your incumbent, the authority to appoint you at any time in the year up to the number elected today, so don't think you have to wait till next year's vestry to volunteer.

As for liturgical assistance, there will be a sign up list of duties at the back of the church and then on the bulletin board for anyone who wishes to volunteer for one of those.

Please prayerfully consider where you can give of your talents.

Finally there is the gift of finances.

During the vestry portion of this service, will be hearing of what appears to be a never-ending need for money to maintain St. Theodore's.

This is not an option if St. Theodore's is to keep its doors open.

To maintain a building in which to worship requires an ongoing income, like any other property.

We all have to pay our rent or our mortgage otherwise we have to give up our home – that is the reality of the world and that is the same with a **church** building.

To maintain it means up-grading our regular givings.

Michael Marshall in one of his articles puts it this way:

*'Stewardship in the life of the church is much more than begging members to float the church just above the waterline. It is engaging members in exploring and celebrating the encounter with God in worship, learning and mission'.*

Today, as with the early church, we are also beginning a campaign to ask you to give to the wider church.

The message of the Gospel is much bigger than St Theodore's.

It is bigger than preaching to the converted and the comfortable each Sunday – more and more to a diminishing number of people.

There is only so much we can do at the **local** level.

Because of this the diocese, under the spiritual leadership of Archbishop Colin Johnson, has set out to raise money for the future of the church as a whole.

We look around each Sunday and see an diminishing and aging people living in the comfort of the known and that is OK if it doesn't stop there.

However, we look outside and we see a very different world – one which is hard to comprehend – I still struggle with computers and as for texting and i-phones I am completely bamboozled.

As we have seen in the Middle East, it is a world hungry for justice and a world eager for meaning.

We have that in the message of the Gospel and that is not getting out there.

It is only in large amounts and with the resources of many working together that we can reach a people in desperation with the message of Christ.

You will be hearing much more about this campaign over the next couple of months and you will be approached to pledge over the next five years to this important mission.

We have a team already at work led by Bonny and the first information insert is in today's bulletin.

The aim of this campaign is to move our diocese in a direction which builds the church for tomorrow in such a way that the wonderful message of Jesus Christ is told to those desperately in need.

It is properly names '**Our Faith – Our Hope – Re-imagine church**'.

I believe this is the time to look beyond our own needs to the wider need of our society for the gospel message of hope and we cannot do it as we did 50 years ago.

We are not accustomed in the Anglican church to giving sacrificially but these are desperate times in a world in desperate need.

We need to regain something of the fervour of the early church and give out of our scarcity and not just out of our abundance.

If we are true followers of Christ and believe in His message, the stewardship of our time, talent and money is not an **option** but an **obligation**.

The spreading of the Good News is not up to someone else but up to **us**.

Pray about where you can be a part of the mission we are called to. Amen