

St. Augustine's Anglican Church Biblical Stewardship 365

Bulletin 7, April 2021

Above all, clothe
yourself with love
which binds
everything together
in perfect harmony.

Colossians 3:14-15

And let the
Peace of
Christ
rule in your
hearts....

...and be grateful!



Stewardship Then and Now

Traditionally 'Stewardship' has been seen as a none-too-popular time in the church year when someone reminds us, none too subtly, that if we are sufficiently grateful to God for all God does for us, we will donate money to fill the church coffers. The corollary is implied. That if we fail to give generously enough, we are obviously not grateful enough to God and that is a problem! I see this approach as being based on coercing people to give by making them feel guilty. Speaking for myself, I really do not think God works this way, so Stewardship must mean something different, and to find out what it does mean, we turn to scripture – hence the 'Biblical' part of **'Biblical Stewardship'**.

'Stewardship is about how we use the gifts God has given us to work with God to make the world a better place, to help build the Kingdom of God on Earth'.

'Stewardship is everything we think, say and do after we first say, "I believe in God...". Stewardship is a fact, you took it on at your baptism, and confirmed it each time you repeated the Baptismal Covenant.

What was a Steward in New Testament Times? A reminder!

The Greek word we translate as **'steward'** is **'oikonomos'**. (The word from which we get our word 'economy'.) This is made up of two Greek words, **'oiko'** meaning **'household'**, and **'nomos'** meaning, **'rules'** and the associated word **'ruler'**. In New Testament times a rich man would appoint a steward who was often a highly competent, trusted slave, to look after his household affairs. This steward would be second in command to the rich man, and would have authority, even over the family. Hence **'oikonomos' - 'household ruler'**.

The steward had considerable autonomy. But, the authority granted him was never to be used for his own self-interest, only to advance the interests of the master to whom he was accountable. Doing nothing with the master's resources was simply not an option if the steward was to keep his position....and his head, I imagine! Could this explain why Jesus did not take kindly to the slave who did nothing in the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30? (*The Parable of the Pounds in Luke:19:11-27*)



God didn't give you
a talent for you to
go bury it!

So....you can choose to be a good, caring, effective steward, or you can choose to do nothing.

Jesus does not have nice things to say about those who do nothing with what they have been given! You will notice in both accounts that the Rich Man who is going on vacation, expects his stewards to use the riches entrusted to them to make his (The Rich Man's) property better. The Rich Man (God) provides the means and resources, and the stewards (us) do the leg work and are accountable to the 'Rich Man'. According to scripture, God's idea of making things better is helping the world to become a fairer, kinder, more peaceful place for all God's children. **Jesus called this transformed earth 'The Kingdom of God' and we pray for it every time we pray, 'Your kingdom come on earth...'**

Stewardship is about how we care for and use what God has given us. Although money is involved at various points, stewardship is most definitely not primarily about money, though money is important. You could be the financially poorest person you can imagine and still be an effective steward!

I believe...

- **Credo** (Latin) is the first word in both the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed.
- **I believe...**(English translation of Credo)
- Literally **'to put one's heart.'**
- You'll notice the root of the ancient word referring to the heart in the word 'Credo'.
- Theologian Dr. Diana Butler Bass uses this association to alter "I believe in God" to **"I give my heart to God"** (and so on with the other creedal statements) to make her recitation of the creeds, fit in with her 21st Century understanding of her faith.
- I like this too!

Can you honestly believe it?

The ever-loving creator of time and space itself, of our universe that our scientists are in the process of discovering, plus any other universes, and anything at all, **trusts us** with carrying out the divine dream of a world where all creatures are treated fairly and have their needs met! We cannot think of things without using language, so we call our Creator, God, other people have different names for the same Reality, but all names are inadequate.

The task we are called to is Stewardship in its widest sense and God has provided us with stories and metaphors to help us understand what this means. The whole purpose of Biblical Stewardship is to help us give concrete shape to 'that which our Lord requires of us.'



The Micah Mandate.

"What does the Lord require of you?
To act justly, and to love mercy and
to walk humbly with your God." ...
Micah 6:8,

What does God want us to do?

The Hebrew Prophets had a lot to say about what God wants us to do. This quote is just an example from among many, it is a quote from the book attributed to Micah, the 8th-century BCE prophet from a village in Judah. Micah reproached unjust leaders and defended the rights of the poor against the rich and powerful, whilst looking forward to a world at peace. The 'Micah Mandate,' gives a balanced answer to today's spiritual and political questions. *(It is important to remember that when we read the word 'justice' in scripture it almost always refers to economic justice and fair treatment.)*

Jesus challenges us to be good Stewards, and as we take to heart his teachings, the same themes, as those written by the prophets, occur. We are called to love God, love our neighbours as ourselves, and do good those who harm us. Jesus used direct teaching (e.g., *The Sermon on the Mount*), and parables, (stories designed to get people to think about justice and fairness) to pass on this same message. Jesus also lived what he preached, and by his actions as well as his words, gave us the best possible example of a life well lived.

"Christ has no body on earth now but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on the world.

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world."

St Teresa of Ávila

So, what is the challenge of Jesus?

- Can you really believe, that as we work for justice and fairness for all, we are living in the Kingdom of God?
- Can you really believe that we can counter the evil, self-centred attitudes of our world, by non-violent resistance?
- Can you really believe that, as we work to establish God's Kingdom, God is working alongside us strengthening us, inspiring us, healing us and leading us? We are most certainly not alone.
 - Are you able to say along with St. Augustine of Hippo, 'Without me God will not. Without God, I cannot'?
 - Can you still work for God's Kingdom, knowing that you will not see its final culmination?
 - Can you really believe that whatever you do - it matters? Few of us can do huge things, but we can all do something.
- Can you also believe that God has already equipped you for the tasks ahead of you?
- Can you really believe that all this 'Kingdom of God' stuff is not 'Pie in the sky' but the most real thing with which you will ever be involved?

It appears that Jesus rose to this challenge!

God shows us what we need to do, also God gives us the gifts we need to do it! Our job is to identify, develop, and use those gifts to help build the Kingdom of God. i.e., to make the world a better place for all God's Children.

This is Stewardship and helping you to do this is what this Biblical Stewardship Program is all about.

Thankyou for reading
these Bulletins.
Keep well.
Happy Summer!
Val McCormack

This Bulletin marks the end of the present Biblical Stewardship theme, but does not mark the end of our roles as God's Stewards.

Look for the next theme in September. We will be looking at some of the gifts we have been given both as a church community and as individuals and see how we are using them to help build the Kingdom of God in this place at this time, and see how this helps us to live into our mission statement that we 'Live Christ in Community through Service' (i.e., Help build the Kingdom of God here and now and in the future.)