

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : May 12th, 2019
“Fourth Sunday of Easter”
Stewardship 1

STEWARDSHIP SERMON 1 – 12 May 2019

I wonder what you are all thinking this morning as I stand in the pulpit to begin the first of two sermons about stewardship. Are you thinking “here we go again – the Church is always asking for money and the Vicar is always talking about it?” Or are you thinking “Good, this is the chance for me to think about how generous God has been to me and ponder how I can be generous in return?” I wonder. All too often we hear that “the church is always asking for money” but do we ever stop and ask why this seems to be? The answer is very simple. Because it seldom has enough! Enough to do all it needs to do and wants to do. We can all understand that the costs of running our church increases every year because the cost of running our own homes increases every year as well. For us there is a large and beautiful building to maintain along with a reasonably busy parish life. All the fine detail is in the annual accounts published recently – but the Christ Church headlines are that it costs **£260** per week to run the church. Administration costs us **£290** per week. Sundries add up to a further **£202** per week. For instance you would be cross if the mike stopped working – or we switched off the lights or the heating – but it all has to be paid for. Repairs and maintenance come to **£250** per week: yes that is a lot – but four tiny panes of cracked glass in the window there – see if you can spot them – are going to cost £500 to repair. We love

our music – well that has to be paid for and works out at £220 per week. So you will quickly see that there are a host of expenses just to support the work of ministry. But by far the largest part of our expenditure is our contribution to the diocese. We are not an independent congregational church but are interconnected with the family of the diocese of Southwark. So we pay £1,576 per week to the diocese. But what, you may ask, do we get in return? Well for part of that you get me! I am paid £27,000 per year and I am housed by the diocese. NI and Pension contributions together with training costs as well as costs towards the national church all have to be paid for – so it is reckoned that each full time priest costs the diocese £78,600. This year we are paying £82,000 which means a bit extra from us went to support some of the poorer and needier parishes in the diocesan family. However we have not increased our share for some years and we know we will need in all conscience to offer more in 2020. Thus the total we spend is £2,700 per week. This represents our housekeeping as members of a family.

Now to our income. We get no money from the government. Apart from weddings and funerals most of our income has to come from the congregation who worship here Sunday by Sunday. So our income is around £2,500 per week. That is a shortfall of around £200 per week. That is the challenge that is facing us today.

Yes you are right that we do have funds in the bank – in the same way that many of us might have some personal savings – but we need to have some savings to ensure that this 160 year old building and its hall continue to be here and in good order to serve the parish of West Wimbledon for the foreseeable future. But of course our support of the church should cover more than just its housekeeping needs. There is also the mission work of the church to think about for the church isn't just bricks and mortar.

For it follows that all are welcome to worship God here at Christ Church and from the time of the early Church it has always been left up to each individual to decide what they can contribute for the life of the church. Throughout scripture the practice of giving combines the practical resourcing of priestly ministry and the work of the church with the act of making an offering back to God which expresses our thanks for his rich generosity to us. Giving has always formed a part of worship. From the earliest times Acts describes the people of the early church like Tabitha giving to share in a communal life. Those who had used what they had to meet the needs of others. Generous giving in the context of worship reflects the importance of giving in community.

The Christian Church has never been a social club that simply divides its annual expenditure by the number of members and then sets the membership fee. We are a family – some members are able to give generously and some members cannot afford to give so much – but all are invited to contribute what they can. I hope that this will happen because we say: “I value my membership of the church, so I give what time and money I can to it because I am pleased to be involved in it and I want to make sure it can continue and grow and flourish”. And it will continue and grow and flourish when we match what we value and what we give in time and effort in what we give financially. We never like talking about money but all I can do is to give you the facts – which is why I hope you will not be wanting to shoot the messenger today – in any case my demise would lead to another long vacancy.

This is your church. I will still get my stipend whatever but what do we want our church to look like? Do we want it to be a warm, welcoming and thriving church, one where it is self-evident that its members are all ‘sharing God’s love’ by walking in faith together, by welcoming both strangers and friends and by working for our

community? Well we need £2,700 every week to do the things we do. £2,700 this week, next week and the week after that.

You get the point, you've heard the message. Please do respond. If you are not in stewardship at the moment and can sign up, thank you. If you are in stewardship already and decide that you can give a bit more, thank you. If you are in stewardship already and decide that you cannot give any more, thank you. If you are in stewardship already and decide that you have to reduce your giving, thank you. All we ask is that we read carefully the contents of your envelope, think about it and pray about it and respond using the form provided, all the while giving thanks to our generous God who has given us so much.

St Paul tells us the church is the body of Christ. St Teresa of Avila helps us to understand what this means in her prayer:

'Christ has no body on earth but ours. No hands but ours. No feet but ours. Ours are the eyes through which is to look out Christ's compassion to the world. Ours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. Ours are the hands with which he is to bless all humanity now". To that prayer we might add:

'He has no purse but ours. Ours is the money that enables good works to happen'.

'Yours Lord is the greatness, the power, the glory, the splendour and the majesty; for everything in heaven and on earth is yours. All things come from you and of your own do we give you. Amen.