

Stewardship

Inspiring a deeper understanding of true giving

June 2023

Amos the Shepherd of Tekoa, earliest of the Hebrew prophets, looking eastward from his hill-top home, viewed the vast expanse of the Judean Desert stretching out to the Dead Sea. In a dry, barren and rock-strewn land, water is a terribly important commodity.

It is small wonder that the life-giving liquid takes a prominent place in so much biblical writing. Looking about him, Amos saw not only an arid landscape, but also a country equally devoid of compassion for the poor, the needy and the oppressed. For this, the Prophet warns the nation that they will feel the wrath of a righteous God.

Although Amos lived in an era of prosperity, he knew what was amiss and cried out, “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.” This is the stuff that quickens the land. Justice and Righteousness are the living waters that renew the country and are truly acceptable offerings to God. Religious festi-

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vals, solemn assemblies, hymnody and sacrifice are of no avail without these qualities, which are also attributes of Divinity.

Seven centuries later, we hear an echo of Amos in the words of the Good Shepherd. Jesus, too, knew the wilderness of Judea and held out living waters



to those who could hear him. He too, thundered against the lack of Justice in the land. While approving the sacrificial tithing of the religious leaders of his day, Jesus also castigated them for their neglect of Justice. Obviously, the Scribes and Pharisees did not see the relatedness of their Tithing and Justice. Can we? Can we not see that a portion of our day, a portion of our effort, and a portion of our treasure must be devoted to the upholding of the Principles of Justice in our land? ∞

The second commandment tells us to love our neighbor; surely we can best express that love by preserving the good environment, both as a person and a voter.



Deacon Dave on stewardship




You may want to make a gift to your parish, but wonder how large your gift should be. There's no right answer to the question, "How much should I give?"

Giving guidelines

The ancient principle of tithing sets an historic example. Centuries ago, ten percent of earnings was the standard. Looking at the changes in taxation, earnings, and living costs, some modern authorities have suggested even five percent is important. Thus, a couple earning \$80,000 per year could consider a guideline between \$4,000 and \$8,000 in annual charitable gifts.

But every gift should come from the heart, not just the pocket. Asking how much, exactly, to give to those who need our help, is asking us to tell you what is in your heart.


Your church touches the lives of people and makes them better. It is a place where the work of Christ can continue. It is your link to the wisdom of the past and the promise of the future. That kind of meaning cannot be reduced to giving formulas and percentages. It requires a response from the heart. 

Rev. John Haughey spoke to a gathering of church leaders about the "Holy Use of Money," taken from the title of a book he wrote. He described what he called "mammon illness," that is so pervasive in our consumer oriented culture.

What is "mammon?"

Rev. Haughey's description of "mammon illness" begins with a definition of the word "mammon." In Luke's Gospel, the word "mammon" is not a neutral term. It is not simply another word for "money." It connotes disorder. Its root meaning is "that in which one puts one's trust." Mammon becomes a source of disorder because people allow it to make a claim on them that only God can make. Rev. Haughey says, "Judging from the many references Jesus made about money and possessions, Jesus must have discerned this mammon illness to be widespread. Concerns about money and possessions constituted a major obstacle to his hearers being able to accept his words about the character of God."

Running after things

One symptom of mammon illness is "running after things." Here Rev. Haughey uses Luke 12 as a reference point: "As for you, do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not worry anymore. All the nations seek for these things, and your Father knows that you need them" (vs. 29-30). It is as if Jesus were saying "To provide yourself with what you need, you think you have to run." He connects running with unbelieving. He invites his hearers to connect slowing down and walking with believing. He doesn't deride providing for oneself, just doing so with anxiety, because anxiety is a sign that a person thinks there is a part of his or her life out of God's loving reach. 

A church member revealed her new-found commitment to tithing with these words: "I have a feeling of such joy when through my tithe to the church I have the chance to share Jesus' mission on earth."

Giving should be a joy for the giver and unselfish giving will be rewarded by God.




Change is occurring all the time, but being sensitive to it is necessary to be able to respond to it. As an agent of change, realize that there is an ongoing need to wake up before it's too late.

If you put a frog in a pot of cold water and then gradually turn up the heat, the frog won't jump out and will ultimately be boiled to death. He is capable of jumping out, yet the urgency or change in the situation fails to stir him into action.

If we could change the world, how would we want to go? For or against God? So, then, if we pretend to care for God at all, we must accept God on God's terms, not our own. And the adjustments we make to accommodate our giving only serve to make the giving more worthwhile.

"If you put a frog in a pot of cold water and then gradually turn up the heat, the frog won't jump out."

I can't change the world. But I can do my own small share. Many calls come to us for our time, talent and treasure. Do we respond to these calls on the personal level, family level, church level, community level? Do we act as an agent of change to make the world a better place? 

Almighty and ever-faithful Lord, gratefully acknowledging your mercy and humbly admitting our need, we pledge our trust in you and each other.

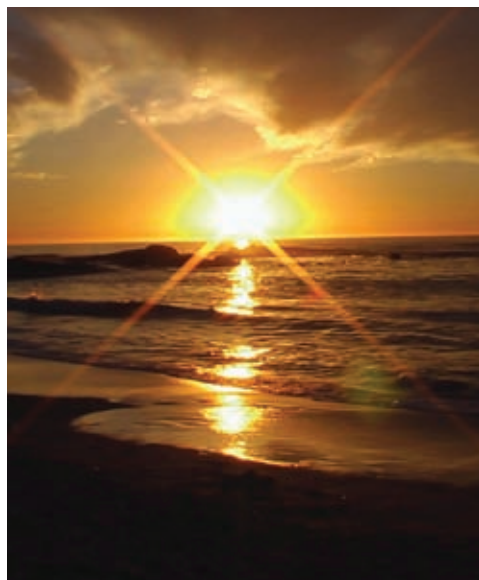
Filled with desire, we respond to your call for discipleship by shaping our lives in imitation of Christ.

We profess that the call requires us to be stewards of your gifts.

As stewards, we receive your gifts gratefully, cherish and tend them in a responsible manner, share them in practice and love with others, and return them with increase to the Lord.

We pledge to our ongoing formation as stewards and our responsibility to call others to that same endeavor.

Almighty and ever-faithful God, it is our fervent hope and prayer that you who have begun this good work in us will bring it to fulfillment in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen



We know that God has given us the time we have on earth ... each minute, each hour, each day. But how often do we think about returning to God a portion of the time given to us? How often do we consciously strive to use our time in expressions of love of God and our neighbor, in helping others, in church work, in assisting in Christ's ministry on earth?



The growing of a bountiful crop of peas requires not only hard work, but also careful planning. Before Farmer Brown gathers his harvest, there are several things he must do. The Apostle Paul was not a farmer, but he outlined a program of stewardship that might be compared to Father Brown's rows of peas. In I Corinthians 16:2, he said that our stewardship should be:

Periodic: "Upon the first day of the week..." What better time to reflect upon our blessings than the day set aside for worship.

Personal: "let each of you..." Stewardship is an individual matter. Each of us has both the opportunity and the responsibility of being good stewards.

Provident: "lay by him in store..." Using all that God blesses us with is not wise stewardship. We should honor God first, not last. Taking God's portion out first keeps us from spending all that we have and then thinking about God.

Proportionate: "...as he may prosper..." God never requires a set amount. Instead we are to recognize God's blessings, and then give as we have been blessed. If God required a certain amount, many could not give it.

Preventive: "...that no collection be made when I come." If everyone gave, there would always be sufficient funds to meet every need. Nothing would be left undone. There would be no need for special offerings, mission offerings, etc. The treasury would run over.

Following the Apostle Paul's plan of church finance will bring in a great harvest. His five rows of "P's" will produce a fine crop year after year if each member will practice his kind of farming. 