

This, God willing, is the last Diocesan Synod that will have to take place virtually. For some of you, this will be the last Synod you attend, and I am sorry that it cannot take place in person. Thank you for all you have given during the last three years: it is greatly appreciated.

I'm delighted to have been able to commission a new Stewardship Adviser and license Alison, the previous post holder, to a new role as Dean of Smaller Churches. Alison has done a great job as Stewardship Adviser and in Chris we have a very good successor. We pray for God's blessing on them both in their new roles.

Stewardship is, of course largely about money and in what may be your last Synod, we shall go on to spend a good proportion of our time talking about money.

If there's a part of you that would rather it were otherwise, that we could concentrate our attention not upon money but upon 'the real issues', maybe it's worth remembering that Jesus talked about it a lot. The parable of the talents, the dishonest Steward, the story of the rich young ruler, the widow's mite, the importance of serving God versus serving mammon – the list goes on and on. A quick count indicates that 19 out of the 47 teachings which are clearly parables relate directly to money or material possessions. And that is just the parables. If the frequency of his sayings in the gospels is anything to go on, Jesus talked about money every other day (or every other teaching). He knew how interesting and vital it is to people. Our Lord made more reference to money and possessions than to either prayer or faith – more than his sayings about heaven and hell combined. And he preached to rich and poor alike.

Why? Because he knew that ultimately our security will be defined by what we depend upon. And in his kingdom, lasting treasure is measured not by what we have, but by what we give away. "For where our treasure is, there will our heart be also," he tells his hearers in St Matthew's gospel. Our giving reflects what is really going on inside us. When Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," he put his finger on our spiritual pulse. He knew the signs of spiritual vitality, and the blockage of the giving arteries that will be a serious risk to our health.

That we are created to be givers follows quite simply from the fact that that we are made in God's image. It is when we give that we will most reflect the gracious God who formed us in his likeness. God's nature is to give, rather than to accumulate. When Christ did not exploit equality with God for his own use but emptied himself, giving himself to a death on the cross, he was expressing something very profound about God. Our God is in the giving business. He can't help it. It's just the way he is. Money Managers in the City would say that God has a real problem: much more expenditure than income. Praise God for his economics.

Although the instinct for self-preservation in us is strong, deep down I think we know that it is only in giving that we will find and enjoy real life. Only in giving to others will we find the real joy and fulfilment we crave.

In our discussions on money, and particularly our consideration of the parish share review, may we bear in mind the words of Jesus in St Matthew:

*“Do not store up for yourself treasures on Earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* (Matthew 6. 19-21)

+John

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