

Scripture:
Luke 16:1-15

“Good and faithful stewardship.”

Happy Anniversary to us!

Today is the 182nd anniversary of this congregation.

And it's been 182 years of good and faithful stewardship.

In 1835 there was good and faithful stewardship as construction began on the Brick Chapel at Thornton's Corners --- the first Presbyterian Church in what is now the town of Whitby.

2 years later in 1837 it was completed.

And then again in 1857 it was good and faithful stewardship as construction began on the new church on Byron Street South.

And once again 2 years later it was completed.

And then in 1962 --- good and faithful stewardship ----- as the land we currently occupy was purchased for the building of a new church.

And so in 1967 construction began on this church ---- and this time we were even faster than the previous 2 builds ---- this time it was the very next year ---- in 1968 that the building was completed.

Good and faithful stewardship ----- from 1833 --- to 2015 and beyond.

Money and possessions ----- stewardship ----- is perhaps the least favourite topics for sermons.

People don't often like to be told --- or counseled on what to do with their money ---- assets --- and stewardship of resources.

And preachers don't usually like to preach about money and possessions ---- - because invariably one's popularity wanes after such Sundays.

Hopefully we're still all good after today.

But the truth is there are about 500 verses on prayer in the Bible ----- less than 500 on faith ---- and over 2,000 on money and possessions.

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Now ---- this is not to say money is more important than prayer ---- or possessions are more important than faith.

What it is to say ----- is that money and possessions can all too easily be stumbling blocks or hindrances to true Christian discipleship.

The great Martin Luther put it wonderfully.

He said ----- "There is first the conversion of the heart ----- and then the conversion of the mind ----- and then thirdly --- and by far the most difficult of all ----- there is the conversion of the pocket book."

The conversion of the pocket book ----- one's money --- possessions ---- and assets.

Beyond just our passage today there are numerous passages in scripture that deal with money --- possessions ---- and assets.

2,000 or so verses.

Genesis 41:46-57

2nd Kings 4:1-7

2nd Chronicles 29:1-36

Proverbs 30:7-9

Matthew 6:1-4

Matthew 6:19-21

Matthew 6:24-34

Matthew 12:1-8

Matthew 12 verse 33

Matthew 22:15-22

Mark 4:18-19

Mark 10: 17-31

Mark 11:15-19
 Mark 12:41-44
 Mark 14:3-9
 Luke 3:7-14
 Luke 6:32-35
 Luke 12:13-21
 Luke 12:32-34
 Luke 14:25-33
 Luke 15:11-31
 Acts 4:32-37
 Acts 20:32-35
 1 Corinthians 12:4-7
 2nd Corinthians 8:9-15
 2nd Corinthians 9:6-15
 1 Timothy 6:6-12
 1 Timothy 6:17-19
 1 John 3:17-18

And others as well.

The Bible is very concerned with how we as Christians manage our financial resources.

In fact as our passage today reminds us we are even to be shrewd ----- with regards to how we manage what we have been entrusted with from God.

We are called to do the very best that we can do with whatever it is that God entrusts us with --- whether it be big --- large sums of money --- possessions and assets ----- or whether it be little ---- small sums of money ---- few possessions and few assets.

Whatever we may think ---- the Bible is very clear about 4 things relating to stewardship.

1. God is a God of abundance and grace.
2. We are but stewards of material resources ----- ultimately they all belong to God.
3. Learning to give is essential to spiritual growth.

and finally

4. Through giving we participate in God's work in the world.

Again -----

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2. We are but stewards of material resources ----- ultimately they all belong to God.

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and

4. Through giving we participate in God's work in the world.

It seems to me that all of these are obvious.

The first 2 ---- God is gracious and abundant in His love and providing for us ----- and we don't truly own anything ---- it's all God's in the end ---- we come into the world with nothing and leave it with nothing --- are fairly easy.

But the last 2 are a little more challenging and difficult to live out.

Learning to give is essential to spiritual growth and in giving we participate in God's work and witness in the world.

Luther is right ----- for many people the conversion of the pocket book is the most difficult conversion of all ----- and ---- it's also true that learning to give is essential to spiritual growth.

I for one know that in my life my spiritual journey moved to a different level once I replaced money being my anchor with God being my anchor.

Once I learned to give generously and Biblically ----- in line with just how generous God has been with me ---- my spiritual life took on new dimensions and depth --- and I was far more at peace with myself.

Good stewardship isn't just about money it's about possessions assets and disposition --- it includes time ---- energy ---- and disposition of the heart.

“Where your treasure is there your heart will be also.” ---- Jesus said.

In other words what you treasure and value most is where your heart and focus are.

Very often when people came to Jesus asking what they need to do to free themselves from bondage to the ways of the world and live into His kingdom --- He said a version of --- “Give away your possessions and follow me.”

“Give away your possessions and follow me.”

We can't have two anchors --- we can't have two reference points in life.

“No one can serve two masters.” ---- Jesus said in our scripture reading today.

“Either you will hate the one and love the other ---- or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

Part of the impact of this is lost on us as thankfully ----- the idea and reality of slavery is past history ----- at least for most of the world anyway.

What this verse is saying is that as a slave --- or servant ----- we cannot serve 2 masters.

As in all master --- slave relationships --- the master possessed the slave ----- and possessed him or her exclusively.

Nowadays we can quite easily do 2 jobs ----- and work for 2 people.

Banker or teacher by day ----- and bartender or musician for example by night.

Or broker by day security guard by night and so on.

Many people find their meaning outside of their job in their spare time.

But a slave had no spare time in the time of Christ ----- every moment of their day ---- every ounce of their energy --- belonged to the master.

They had no time to themselves

Serving God cannot be a part time job ---- or spare time concern.

We either belong to God or we don't ----- we either commit all of ourselves to God --- all of our time --- energy and resources to God or we don't.

That's what ----- "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other ---- or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." ----- is all about.

Either God is our anchor or something else is.

And very often if it is not God it is money.

Because money often provides us with satisfaction --- security --- and a sense of comfort ---- it can very quickly become our anchor and reference point.

If the following statement resonates with you ---- now be careful don't go shaking your head in agreement right away here ----- but if the following statement rings true ----- "When we have money we fell O.K. ---- and when we don't we get a little antsy and anxious."

If this rings true ----- "When we have money we fell O.K. ---- and when we don't we get a little antsy and anxious." --- it probably means that money is our anchor and not God.

And by the way there is no such thing as financial freedom.

There is either freedom ----- or not.

Freedom doesn't have adjectives --- financial or otherwise.

You are either free ----- in Christ ----- or you are anchored and tethered to something else of this world.

Money --- emotions ----- possessions ---- the state of your health --- you're your looks ----- your bank account ----- your reputation --- and so on.

Good and faithful stewardship is absolutely crucial to our walk in faith.

Without it our prayer life sags ----- without it our faith is fragile ---- without it our mission and witness is weak and often even misguided.

Without it we moor our boat to a fixture that is passing and a life raft that is sinking.

Financial freedom isn't freedom at all ----- you still need freedom of the heart and mind.

Conversion of the heart isn't conversion at all ----- you still need conversion of the mind and of the pocket book.

You are either free in Christ or you aren't --- on an ultimate level.

And you have either experienced a conversion in Christ or not --- there are no partial conversions ----- or partial freedoms.

We either belong to God or we don't ----- we either commit all of ourselves to God --- all of our time --- energy and resources to God ----- or we don't.

That's what ----- "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other ---- or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." ----- is all about.

This is a congregation that has a long and rich history ---- of good and faithful stewardship.

182 years of it and counting.

It's something that we are to celebrate.

It's something that we are to continue on --- and live in to.

The world we live in today is such that there are many ways to be good and faithful in our stewardship.

Our planned giving ministry ---- here at St. Andrew's ----- is all about celebrating and encouraging good and faithful stewardship.

The very same good and faithful stewardship that has been in place since the very beginning of this worshipping community 182 years ago.

The history of this church --- I cited the most obvious examples ---- with the building of 3 different places of worship ---- bears witness to great generosity --- great stewardship --- giving as an essential part of spiritual growth ----- and way to participate in God's work and kingdom building in the world.

As a community of faith ---- we have participated generation after generation in what it means to be good and faithful stewards of all that God has entrusted us with.

And may we continue to for 182 more years.

My hope is that in another 182 years when none of us are around there will be another sermon preached on good and faithful stewardship about this congregation.

And how more hearts were led to Christ ---- and more poverty and oppression was alleviated ---- on account of the good and faithful stewardship of St. Andrew's in Whitby.

Wouldn't that be something to celebrate?

I'm sure our foremothers and forefathers in the faith take great delight in seeing that we are still a beacon of light --- and faith --- and all that is good - ----- and Christ centered.

And so today as we think about 182 years ----- and how to carry on for 182 more years.

May we continue to be generous --- as God is generous.

May we continue to make sacrifices --- as God made a sacrifice in Christ.

May we consider planned giving ----- wills --- stocks ---- gift annuities ---- life insurance policies ----- all the various ways we can be good and faithful stewards ----- remaining true to the generous --- gracious and saving way of Jesus Christ.

May we continue to share all that we have been blessed with.

May we continue on in the tradition of those who have gone before us looking into a future that we may never see for ourselves ---- planting trees that we may never see fill out.

God is good.

Look around in and outside of this building --- God is good --- He is beautiful --- His creation is beautiful.

There is much to celebrate and be thankful for.

All because of generosity and grace ----- God's generosity and grace.

And the generosity and grace of those He blesses ---- who exercise good and faithful stewardship.

Remember -----

1. God is a God of abundance and grace.
2. We are but stewards of material resources ----- ultimately they all belong to God.
3. Learning to give is essential to spiritual growth.

and

4. Through giving we participate in God's work in the world.

Happy anniversary to us.

Here's to 182 years ----of good and faithful witness --- and good and faithful stewardship ---- and here's to many many more.

Amen.