

Money and the Bible

As it happens, this contribution coincides with my retirement from the role of Diocesan Stewardship Adviser, after 11 years. It also coincides with the annual review of Planned Giving now under way in our Parish. So I will reflect on some Bible texts which have helped me in my Diocesan ministry in the hope that they will fit the current context of our Parish.

Perhaps the place to start is to say that there are over 2300 verses in the Bible which talk about money and possessions. They deal with pretty well every aspect you can imagine – investment, legacy, poverty, wealth, spending, saving, generosity, greed and much more. There is much wisdom and teaching for us to discover. It is absolutely valid for us to use the bible as a reference point with authority as we wrestle with the issues of our money and possessions – how we gain it, store it and use it. In this offering I will concentrate on one aspect of money and possessions, that of giving.

I'd like to share three sources which have struck a chord most often as I have worked with many Parishes in this Diocese. These are:

Jesus' encounters
Jesus' parables
Life of the early church

Jesus' encounters

Luke 18 18-26 and Luke 19 1-10 contain two contrasting responses to the fundamental challenge which Jesus throws down to those who would follow him. The challenge is that our discipleship requires us to recognise that everything we have actually belongs to God we cannot deny that. Whereas the Rich Ruler walked away when faced with that challenge, Zaccheus met it with generosity. This tells me that whatever I gather, give or spend must reflect my journey of faith. For each of us that journey is unique.

Jesus' Parables

Many of Jesus' parables deal with money and possessions. One which seems to underline our role as stewards is the parable of the talents (Luke 19 12-27). We are called to make full and positive use of what God has given us. We are not simply to protect it "for a rainy day". A bit of healthy spiritual speculation is good for us and for God's Kingdom so long as we remember that we are indeed acting as stewards. This can relate to us as individuals or as a church community.

Giving to our Parish so that we can try out new ways of growing in faith and outreach (such as employing a Youth Leader) seems to fit well with this aspect of our Christian Stewardship.

The early Church

A telling moment occurs as soon as the first community of Christians began to form in Acts 2 43-47. Their immediate response included sharing their possessions and distributing the proceeds of what they sold to those in need. This model of a church

community is worth pondering. As stewards of God's bounty, what does our church community receive from each of us and what do we give away to those in need? We are called to be contributors to both.

Traditionally and with good reason we can also look at the lessons learned from St Paul about the very practical needs and responses of the young churches. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 Paul uses the good example of the churches in Macedonia to draw out several principles for Christian giving, which we continue to learn from today. These include:

Giving voluntarily according to our needs (8:3 and 8:12)

Giving first to the Lord (8:5)

Excelling in giving (8:7)

Giving as you have decided, not reluctantly or under compunction (9:7)

Giving cheerfully (9:7)

God loves a cheerful giver (9:7)

We will be enriched by our generosity (9:8-12)

As we take our sometimes faltering steps along the road of discipleship, it seems clear that we cannot separate our attitude to money and possessions from the rest of the journey's joys and challenges. How we reflect the teachings of Jesus and to the examples of the early church will do much to help our Christian pilgrimage more complete.