



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
10-14-12

“Sell what you own, give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” Boy that’s a line from the Bible that ought to cause literal readers of the Bible some discomfort and squirming. It’s pretty direct isn’t it? Sell what you own, give the money to the poor, then come and follow me. And it’s not an admonition that has been ignored. Peter says that the disciples have left everything and followed Jesus. And Jesus promises treasures in heaven and eternal life and recognition for what they have done. Selling or giving away all that you own has been a foundational premise of many monastic orders – all things held in common and no individual possessions. In the book of Acts some of the earliest of churches tried that way of common life together. Give it all away or to the community and live a life of no possessions. That must have worked for some people...it didn’t work out to well for Ananias and Sapphira who sold their land and then tried to hold back some of the profit for themselves and fell down dead when they lied about it to the apostles. So, you see – it’s not like we all are able to do it the same way.

Jesus gave those instructions to the rich young man and I think it is advice for all of us to consider. It certainly appears that many who followed Jesus gave away their possessions and their careers. I would think we look for the value in that admonition and apply it to our own lives. But as is the case always in the Bible – there is other advice given to us about our possessions and about our giving. In fact, the importance of giving in many ways and means flows through the Bible from Genesis onward.

Right after the creation stories we have the story of Cain and Abel and the conflict that arises when they each present their offering of their labor to God. God appears to appreciate the offering from Abel and not the one from Cain, so you know, Cain in jealousy and anger murders Abel. But note that the whole thing stemmed from their offering some of the fruits of their labor to God. Then not much further on, Abram meets the Priest Melchizedek and gives him 1/10 of everything he owns. Jacob also, when on his way to meet his brother Esau has a dream conversation with God and upon arising promises to give God 1/10th of all he has. So, from the start, the offering of your possessions, and specifically the offering of 1/10 of your possessions to God became a standard of giving for the People of God. It was called a tithe – a tenth of all you had.

The emphasis on giving flows through the Bible from Old to New Testament. In fact, I read that “believe” appears in the Bible 273 times, “pray” 371 times, “love” 714 times and “Give” appears

2,172 times. Jesus knew there was great value for that young man to give what he had to the poor.

Now when you study the Bible, the teachings on giving and on tithing varied between giving to God, through the church or temple or priest, or giving what you had to those in need. Both ways involve giving and once you have given, what you give goes on its own journey separate from you. You are blessed in the sharing and in having lighter baggage to carry with you.

But I think we should look a little more closely at giving to the church community or to the poor. In the book of Acts, when the early Christian churches were forming, they literally took each Sunday's gathering and went out to share it with the poor – with widows and orphans. In fact, there still remains in our Canons of the Episcopal Church the rule that on one Sunday in each calendar month, all contributions and other offerings not specifically designated be given to the poor. When in Chapter 6 of Acts, complaints surfaced between the Hellenists who said that the Hebrews didn't share as much with their widows as with the Hebrew widows; 7 disciples were chosen to oversee the giving away of those collections. These men were probably our first deacons – those chosen to serve the poor.

Which leads to our consideration of a Resolution presented at our Diocesan Convention by the Deacons of the Diocese. I'll read it to you... "Be it resolved that the 46th Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming invites its members to begin all meetings in Calendar Year 2013 at the parish, institutional, or diocesan level, and no matter what the purposes, with this agenda item: "How will what we are doing here affect or involve those living in poverty?" This resolution passed.

"Sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven..."

We have a tradition here at St. Andrew's of taking time each year to consider as individuals what we will give of our possessions and wealth to the church. We call this time our Stewardship campaign or our time for Consecration, consecrating meaning what we will devote or make sacred in our life by offering it to God. We use pledge cards to indicate some of what we intend to give to the church. And I think those pledges are a sacred act of giving, of letting go of some of what we have, of making decisions and taking actions that involve giving away in order to travel more lightly in the footsteps of Jesus.

But how about we go even further this year? How about we return to taking what is offered to the church and offering it right back out to the poor? We began our last Vestry meeting with the question, "How will what we are doing here affect or involve those living in poverty?" And I asked the Vestry to consider a commitment next year to tithing or pledging a percentage of each month's offerings to the poor. When we receive our Treasurer's report and we note the month's income – then we learn that we have \$500 or \$1,000 dollars to offer to the poor. And we can vary where that goes. You all can make suggestions. We can send a check to Episcopal Relief and Development. We can send scholarship support to the Bishop Stanway Primary School in Dodoma, Tanzania. We can offer it to a Habitat for Humanity build. We can buy paint for someone in need in town. The possibilities are endless and I think the lightness and joy in our hearts will be amazing.

“Sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven..”

Thanks be to God.