

SERMON UNIVERSITY CHAPEL SUNDAY, Jan. 10 2016.
STEWARDSHIP.
(First Sunday after Epiphany)

Topic: Stewardship

(Text for the day: Acts 8:14-17.)

Introduction: Let us pray:

Lord, you have called us to be in partnership with you as your stewards. This New Year, help us to be truly faithful stewards by the empowerment of your Holy Spirit.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight O Lord my strength and my Redeemer. Amen.

Acknowledgements:

Please accept my sincere thanks to you father Garth and you the members of this worshipping Community for the invitation to share in this manner, and your willingness to listen.

A very warm welcome to all of you who will spend some time reading this message and follow the series on line. God is beside you and within you even as you reflect on God's message to you.

I pray that our sharing will be blessed by God and used by God to enhance the challenges of our ministry in times like these.

Definition of Stewardship:

If I ask any of you to give me a definition of Christian Stewardship which was given last year, would you remember? (Pause). Unfair to ask you for that after such a long time eh!

Well, here is one I saw in a book on Christian Stewardship by (Winston Nembhard)

He tells of a young man who many years ago had lost everything he had in the cheese industry and was deeply in debt. He was told by a sympathetic Christian that he needed to take God into his business.

“You did not work with God in the first place.” To this he replied rather

half-heartedly, “If God wants to take over and run the business, He can do it and I will work for Him and with Him and remain as a partner.” From that day he named God the senior partner. The business grew by leaps and bounds and became the biggest cheese outlet in the world, the Kraft cheese company of Chicago.

Christian Stewardship therefore is a comprehensive plan and programme of living which takes into account the management of one’s time, treasure or money, material possessions and talents—all of those gifts and graces (1Peter 4: 10: 1 Cor: 12) with which our Creator, God, has endowed us. The way we manage and use those gifts is an essential part of the stewardship of our lives and all our affairs in which God is interested and holds us entirely responsible and accountable. (Luke 16:2; Romans 14: 12).

The good steward is also required to be **Faithful**.

Psalm 33: 4-5 says: “For the word of the Lord is right and all his works are sure. He loves righteousness and justice; the loving-kindness of the Lord fills the whole earth.” **We**, God’s servants need to know what our faithfulness to God looks like.

Devotional writer Lelanda Lee in our “Forward Day by Day” tells us that, “Faithfulness with God is steadfastness in our love of God and honouring God’s will in all aspects of our lives.” She says as well that having regular worship and prayer habits, doing service and charity are good fruits of our faith, but being faithful ultimately means

surrendering to God’s way of doing things instead of our way. It means spending our attention on God’s work and will instead of being distracted by the attractions and addictions of this world.

So, being a faithful steward is about being in right relationship with God. It is about loving God so much that we want always to walk hand-in-hand with God at our side. (This might be a good pledge we could make for the New Year.)

Even as we are walking hand- in - hand with God at our side, some of us, God’s Stewards, are very frightened in this present world with all its atrocities.

One devotional writer Martha Highsmith gives us a strong reminder that: ‘The worries of this world are so weighty, the problems so intractable, we can feel so overwhelmed by the enormity. It would be like trying to empty the ocean with a teaspoon. So many of us give up in despair and conclude, “We cannot fix all these wrongs.”’

Furthermore, there is so much more involved in carrying out this Stewardship mandate as brother **Winston Nembhard in his book on “Christian Stewardship Roots and Fruits” states. He says, “Today’s concept of Christian Stewardship,” requires that we address the following issues:**

Unemployment:

“With the advancement of technology” he says, “fewer persons are needed to carry out the same functions that in the past required several times the number of persons needed today.” What ought we to do as God’s stewards? Then there is:

Education and skills Training

“The harsh economic fact is that only the best in everything will survive. The professional as well as the skilled crafts man (I add woman) must be prepared to learn new skills... Therefore as the requirements for employment change, new skills become necessary. Isn’t it a part of our duty as Christian Stewards to inform and educate our congregants especially the young people at summer camps etc?

Of course there is the great problem of:

Poverty

Brother Nembhard states that: “The word poverty defines the state or condition that exists among a group of persons of a nation or collectively. This condition results from social factors caused by injustice or an absence of opportunity in the society. These injustices stem from the abuse of economic power by the rich and wealthy, the powerful, and influential, whose wage policies do not reflect the true needs of their employees...” “As stewards we can no longer cast our

gaze the other way or pretend not to see or not to care. No longer can we rely on the generosity of government or quasi- government agencies for hand outs or some stop-gap effort which places a patch here and there. Stewardship demands that every effort be made to give everyone a chance to live a better life and in fact the abundant life.” (John 10:10).

Then there are the health problems.

You as well as I know that the health problems of our day are many and awesome. Many are spiraling out of control (for example HIV/AIDS, Ebola etc). There is, “too the resurgence of tuberculosis and malaria in many parts of the world, particularly in some countries of the Third World including the Caribbean and the Americas.

Other social issues like domestic violence, child abuse, gambling as well as “lotto scam” do face us the Christian Stewards of today. Are Christian Stewards, by the fact of our faith in the God of justice called to be involved, and how?

One Pastoral Care counselor addressing the mission of the Church states that unless we deal with the deep needs of people we surely will become irrelevant.

Maybe this might be one of the reasons why some of our traditional churches are quite empty these days.

Fundamental Question

We are faced with a fundamental question, the question asked by those who came out to listen to the preaching of John the Baptist. The question being;

What Shall We Do?

John’s response: “Do those things that will show that you have turned from your sins.”

In preparing the way for the Messiah, John became an itinerant preacher. He called for repentance and fruitful living. For John, repentance is a radical examination of and retrospection on one’s personal and public life. It is required of all and no one would be barred from the impending judgments because of their ethnic or religious heritage. The faith of the

ancestors will be honoured only when it is emulated by succeeding generations. People who claim great ancestry in faith should examine their lives closely.

We Christians are often told that we cannot become so “heavenly minded that we are of no earthly use.”

After all, there were many personal issues these religious people who came out to hear John’s preaching had to deal with, and so do we.

If we wish to respond to God’s call as God’s stewards in today’s world we’ll have to subject ourselves to a thorough heart-searching as the Psalmist prayed. “Search me O God and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts and see if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Devotional writer Lelanda Lee in today’s Gospel Lesson (Day by Day) says that there are some misconceptions we have about ourselves, some bad habits, and our tendency for self-deprecation which must go. She also reminds us as well that as we age we need to throw away outdated preconceptions of ourselves, simplistic understandings of God, and romanticized ideas about how the world may work.

Maturing of our lives and in our expressions of faith is indeed a baptism of fire. The dead parts of ourselves are burned away, thrown out with the chaff.

She concludes: “The fire can be healing, and it can burn away the things that prevent us from growing” as God’s stewards.

So it is that Charles Wesley in one of his hymns wrote:

Refining fire go through my heart,
Illuminate my soul.

Scatter Thy life through every part
And sanctify the whole.

The Psalmist’s prayer should be ours as well:

**Create in me a clean heart O God
And renew a right Spirit within me.**

As the prophet Jeremiah says: “The new covenant that I will make with the people of Israel will be this: I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.” Until we are willing to be transformed by the power of God’s Holy Spirit, and keep our side of the covenant, we will be just good religious people, and not fully committed stewards for God.

John’s message informs us that, Repentance is critical, however, it is only a part of life and therefore it needs to be complemented with a reorientation in life.

In response to the crowd’s question, John was advocating being generous with half of all of one’s resources. What a radical nature of his call then; and more so now to us the church as God’s stewards.

John says::

‘If you have something extra, share it with someone who has nothing. If you have food and people around you are hungry (and not only at Christmas time), feed them. If you are in a position of authority, avoid the abuse of power. Set right your relationship with others. Be satisfied with what you have. (No lotto scamming, or gambling), of course John didn’t say that. Do not try to advance yourself at the expense of another. And if we can’t change the world in this way, we will perhaps change ourselves.

“Our preoccupied, distracted, crowded souls will be swept clean by holy wind and fire, leaving room for a fearless joy says Martha C. Highsmith, Assistant Vice President and lecturer in Divinity at Yale University. Sharing, thus, becomes a fundamental aspect of a fruitful stewardship life. John also suggested that a moral, ethical and simple life style would bring in an era of corruption –free world.

Conclusion:

The accountable, obedient, faithful Christian steward ought to subject him/herself to the transforming power of God and to respond to the needs of its community.

The Anglican “Togetherness” group is a good one, preparing itself spiritually for the mission. The visiting group reaching out to students on both campuses as well as the surrounding communities is terrific. It was the very thing that Jesus spoke of in Acts 1:8 when he said, “You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.” This gospel grew and expanded beyond the confines of Judaism. This was no mere “movement”, what God was up to was the sheer life of the Church.

Stewardship is not a tacked-on programme of God’s Church. Through the total mission of the Church, the Spirit of God then and now was, and is lifting the gospel into every corner of creation. This then is the Churches’ call to Evangelize, through her comprehensive programme on Stewardship.

Lee McGlone a preacher said he read afresh Michael Green’s Evangelism in the Early Church. He said that he talked about the cities of the first centuries. They were as secular as could be. All the problems that we have, they had even more so. Christianity had no friends there. Yet the early missionaries, like Paul, Silas, Lydia and the others, had great success in the cities. And then Michael Green told us why. Success came not because of great crusades or powerfully articulate preachers. The difference came as ordinary Christians went about doing two things: telling others about their experience of faith, and going about doing good for people in need. And perhaps a third, the pagan world saw how nobly the martyrs died for their faith. So, how about us?

**O church of God arise,
And take your lamp of love,
The light that never dies
On earth in heaven above.**

**Whatever things are fair
Whatever things are just,
Go make them free as air
And plenteous as the dust.**

**My talents, gifts and graces Lord
Into Thy blessed hands receive,
And let me live to preach Thy Word,
And let me to Thy glory live.
My every sacred moment spend
In publishing the sinner's Friend.**

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.