

SERMON: STEWARDSHIP SUNDAY 22.11.09

This is a transcript of the sermon given by Joan Walding (Chair of the Stewardship committee) and Tim Stead on Stewardship Sunday 2009.

1. Joan Walding

When I first began to worship regularly at this church about three years ago I looked around for somebody who could set up a standing order for me so that I could support all the activities of the church. It took some time to find the right person and I was introduced to many people one of whom was the, then, Treasurer, John Drummond. I innocently asked him if there was any organised Stewardship in the church and a few weeks later I was the chair of the newly formed Stewardship committee!

I now know that the person I should have spoken to is Andie Wilson who lives at 39 Staunton Road OX3 7TJ 01865 762399 Andie will not only organise a standing order for you he will also tell you how to add Gift Aid. If you pay tax the church can claim an extra 28 pence for every pound you donate.

I don't mind being on the Stewardship committee because I think it is important that we all support the work Holy Trinity is doing as best we can. If we want to worship regularly, to have good leadership, to nurture our community and to look outward to see how we can help others, then we need money. All we are asking you to do is to reassess what you give to support the work of the church to see if it is possible to give just a little bit more. Ideally this will be by Standing Order because then the Treasurer knows how much to expect over the year and can budget accordingly – and for that you need to contact Andie! Envelopes are good but they depend on you coming each week, on remembering to bring the envelope and having the right amount of money in the house.

I don't mind asking for money because I believe being part of a thriving, caring, outward looking church is a privilege and worth supporting. We are dependent on the generosity of all our members and have never been let down. Thank you all very much.

Joan Walding on behalf of the Stewardship committee: Jon Catterall, Andie Wilson, Stephen Purbrick

2. Tim Stead

Firstly, three brief points:

- i. We would all be on very dodgy ground if we presumed to suggest how one another ought to spend our money, but there is one point perhaps I can make and it is this: as Christians and as thinking people it would seem important to take time to reflect on the things that really matter to us in life – the things that are of real, profound, value, and deliberately to steer our limited resources towards those things. Otherwise, you know how it can be: we cough up for the first things that come along purporting to be urgent and then find we have nothing left for what we really did feel was important. So, just a suggestion

- really that we might all take time out to consider this point: what is of real value to you and is your money heading towards those things?
- ii. Of course one very simple point is that we all benefit from this church community and so we all, quite rightly, and before we start talking about being generous, should try to take our share in paying the bills. It is, as it should be, each according to our means – there is no subscription and never will be but we all need to pay a share as best we can.
 - iii. And thirdly, just to remind us all that it costs a lot more than it once did! Not only have costs gone up but the subsidy that used to be there is no longer available. So the full cost of running this church is now entirely born by this congregation. There is nowhere else we can look for help: we have to look to ourselves. So we need to try and bear in mind the realistic costs we are talking about and think in terms of pounds per week rather than pennies!

But what I really want to go on to talk about is what it is that we are actually paying for and why it might feature high in our list of what is of real value in our lives – not only for ourselves but for others.

It has always been the Anglican vision to have a visible presence of the love of Christ, in the form of a sacred building and a thriving Christian community, in every corner of every county in the land – so that, wherever you live, and whether you are a church-goer or not, you know very clearly the place where you will find the values of Christ represented by a loving, welcoming community; where you can come for baptisms, weddings and funerals; where (in our case) you can lay your loved ones to rest and where you can come to a beautiful place to remember them; where you can come for a few moments quiet prayer in the midst of a busy, stressful world; and where you know you will find help and support in your life if you need it. We should never underestimate the enormous value of simply being here, keeping the flame alive for the many people of our local community. Just because people don't come to church doesn't mean that they do not value our presence. In fact I find, day by day, evidence quite to the contrary.

And on this 160th anniversary of the dedication of this church we are reminded of the generations of people who have put heart and soul, into keeping that vision alive because they believed it was one of the most valuable things they could do with their time and money. And so, in a sense, we should particularly feel, today, the responsibility to make sure we hand this church – both building and church community – on to the next generation in at least as good and preferably better state than that which we received it in. We give thanks for all who have gone before us and honour them by giving our all to continue to keep this vision alive.

But so far I have only talked about maintaining what we have. We also have ambitions to be proactive in reaching out to those, both local and worldwide, who we don't yet have contact with but who may well value our help and support.

Just to mention a few of these ambitions:

- i. We are seeking to develop our work with young families and children through partnerships with local schools and through the new HT4U

- family service, which itself has already put us in contact with people we have never met before. This work will need our support.
- ii. We want to be a clearer Christian presence in parts of the parish which may not be so aware of our tucked away and well hidden building! For instance, as you know, we are seeking to steer Alastair's ministry towards the Wood Farm community (which is a lovely community but in some ways is very needy) in order to support people in their struggles and in their aspirations as well as to be a visible Christian presence for those who are looking for one.
 - iii. But we are also a church which seeks to be very conscious of our place within the worldwide community. Our Justice and Peace group are highlighting aspects of life in various parts of the world which should rightly attract our concern. Also we are starting to talk about setting up a link with an Anglican parish in a financially poorer area of a developing country. This will primarily be for mutual growth and understanding but, of course, where there is financial need, we will want to be able to respond.
 - iv. And finally there are the 4 charities which we officially support as a parish: Archway and the Church Urban Fund at home and Christian Aid and the Christian Hospital in Velore, South India, overseas. We have recently sent our cheques to them for the year and it has been heart-warming to receive their letters of thanks, knowing how tight it is for charities in this time of financial crisis. And I should add that we have not been able to give as much as we have wanted in the last two years because our church finances have not been as sound as we would have liked them to be. It would be so good to be able to give more.

But, although we have ambitions, we have also tried to keep these realistic and manageable and so we have set our budget for next year based on a £6000 increase in income - on a £114,000 turnover. With about 200 givers in the church, this would equate to an extra £30 each, on average, for the whole year! Now to me this sounds manageable and I would hope would not be beyond anyone. However, there will be many who, for one reason or another will not manage this and so don't forget that we are hoping others will be able to give more!

So, finally, it would be wonderful to be able to head into the coming years and to be responding to what we feel is the call of the gospel on our church community, without worries about how it will all be financed. So please take time to reflect on how you can be part of this vision to be faithful both to generations in the past and in the future and for the sake of the Kingdom of God in this place.