

St Peter's, Ealing  
Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2018  
Trinity 14 Proper 17  
Stewardship Programme 2018 – Giving in Grace

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The Christian view of the world is different from that of others. The Christian believes that what we have is not ours. That everything belongs to God. What we do have is a gift from God. As what we have is a gift from God, what we do have should be used appropriately and wisely for the good of others as well as ourselves.

Now just take a minute to let that sink in... The Christian believes that what we have is not ours. That everything belongs to God. What we do have is a gift from God. As what we have is a gift from God, what we do have should be used appropriately and wisely for the good of others as well as ourselves.

If we grapple with this expression of the Christian life our world view must be affected. How we see possessions and actions; how we understand our relationship to things and people. The view of the world we have becomes counter cultural. In a world of 'my' and 'mine', 'ours' and 'we' sound strange. My choice, my way, my stuff speaks of a world of self-centredness and personal gain. The Christian Gospel speaks of a community in service to each other centred on God; our choice, our way, our stuff.

This is an important part of Christian teaching. St Paul describes the church as being the body of Christ. We are all connected and interlinked through the good news of Jesus, through his teaching and example, through his death on the cross made once for all of us and his resurrection from the dead. In this action God's promise of love is revealed to the world, to you and me. It is through the cross and empty tomb that God's love is given in grace.

What happens in the Gospel and what we read in the Bible don't stop at those pages. In claiming our Christian faith these words have consequences for us. In faith we are expected to follow the way of Jesus; to live in the truth and light of his teaching. The life we are encouraged to live may be considered counter cultural; may make us look, in the words of St Paul, like fools in the eyes of the world; fools for Christ. In this view we should be prepared not to follow the way of the world but the way of Christ.

It is easy, living in the world as we do, for this truth to be lost. So easy to be swept away by the 'my/mine' mentality and to forget how the example of Jesus' servanthood should be a guiding principle for us; to remember how God has given to us in grace and how we are encouraged to give in grace; to remember that everything belongs to God; that God has freely given and we should give freely.

It is important to take time out in the Christian year to remember these truths and to think about how we live them out in our lives. Stewardship Programmes aim to do this. Today, with

the launch of 'Stewardship 2018 Giving in Grace', we begin our time of reflection, to think about and pray about how we give in grace; how we re-align ourselves with the example of Jesus and the gifts God has given us. To focus on our stewardship of those gifts of God; gifts of intellect and skill; gifts of time and ability; gifts of wealth and possessions.

In today's epistle, James instructs the reader to be 'doers of the word, and not merely hearers'. For James if we simply passively hear the good news of Jesus we deceive ourselves into believing we are committed participants in the faith. We hear yet we walk away unchanged. For James, doers will be blessed in the act of doing, in actively living the good news of Jesus; it is in participating in the work of God that we are changed, challenged and renewed, for we realise that every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above. It is not just of our own will but is of God who is Father to us all. Our doing is reviewed and freshly expressed as we re-commit ourselves to good stewardship of all we have in light of our faith in Jesus Christ.

Over the next couple of weeks we will take time to reflect on our own stewardship. An information pack is being prepared and an invitation to our Pledge Sunday service on the 23<sup>rd</sup> is offered. I strongly encourage you to prayerfully reflect on how you might respond creatively and faithfully to the call to renewed stewardship in the life of the parish as well as in your daily life.

This does ask of us to reflect on our giving to the church in the ways of finance, skills and abilities. This place, this community cannot survive without your offering. If you have read this month's newsletter you will see we are struggling financially. We can solve this if we all give well. We can't all give of time as for many of us spare time is in short supply. But we can support the church financially which would free us all up for service and prayer in the best way we can.

Above all think about how God freely gives and blesses you and ask God how you may freely give to his world, and in so doing share God's blessing with those around you.