

St Peter's, Ealing

Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2018

Trinity 15

Isaiah 35.4–7a: James 2.1–10, 14–17: Mark 7.24–37

## Stewardship Week 2: Faith without works is dead.

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I'm going to let you in to a little secret. I struggle with stewardship programmes. They aren't my favourite thing. At some point there will be a conversation that begins something like "Well, all you want is more money" or "we're doomed, we're doomed!!"—or something like that. And yes, we do need more money; no we're not doomed. More of us need to understand ministry, like everything else costs and unfortunately we can't run this place on £5 a week anymore.

Part of the job this couple of weeks is to thank all of you who give regularly; and also to make sure you understand why it takes a lot more than £25 a month to run St Peters, that we could really do with your help to raise our finances, whether that is through increasing your regular giving or by you helping to find other ways to fund the work here. We aren't a club or business that can set a charge or a fee. Everyone must be able to come in for God's Grace is free, his love is free; as we freely receive so we are asked to freely give.

So yes, there is this very practical aspect of funding the mission and ministry from which we benefit. But stewardship should be an integral part of our Christian life, so in some ways we shouldn't have to preach about it or run a programme for it. Stewardship is the outworking of our faith in our life. It is by what we do and how we live our life that our faith and God's love for us is witnessed to. How do people know you are a Christian? By the good stewardship of our lives.

In his letter, read to day, St James offers a killer punch; 'faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.' It is good to have faith in Christ Jesus. But if it just stays there what good is it? The Christian faith is not a passive entity. It's not something we read about or sing about and do nothing about. Christians should be passionate about the work of God. It is so wonderful to have God in our lives and to know God's love in our hearts we should be passionate in our desire to share that love. Sharing that love is showing others how real it is in the example of how we live

our lives, by living what God's love means, how it has changed us and how it empowers us to want to change the world for the better. St James is writing about a passionate living faith that wants to be fulfilled in the world. Stewardship should be about that. It should be about others and not about ourselves. It should be about giving our lives generously to others and not about holding back for ourselves.

This isn't as easy. We have jobs and lives and responsibilities. St James would recognise that. The call is still there. With what we can we are encouraged to live our life as Christians in all we do, to be good stewards that use what time, talents and money we have, to care for the poor, feed the hungry, clothe the naked and preach the good news in word and action. To make good ethical, professional and personal decisions that reflect our faith in Jesus. If we are not sure how to do this then we must pray for god's guidance and wisdom, something we should probably do more often. Prayer, being with God, has to be at the centre of what we do.

Stewardship then is not purely inward looking, something that aims at what happens in St Peter's. That may be where it starts but stewardship encourages us to look outwards into the world. St James is keen our actions proclaim the love God has for us to those who have yet to hear the good news. It begins here, in what we do to learn the faith and to be built up in the body of Christ. As we gather at the altar to receive the sacrament so we start our mission as good stewards. Here we have our context and understanding of the world. In the broken bread and outpoured wine of the Eucharist we define ourselves as the disciples of Jesus. It is that discipleship we take out into the world and declare through our actions.

As we continue in our stewardship programme I ask you to pray that we may give in grace, that we may answer St James' call to a living faith, that the spirit of God will fill our hearts and encourage us in our journey of faith to live the good news of Jesus.