

The 3rd Sunday after Pentecost, June 14, 2026
St. Andrew's Church, Kitchener
Holy Communion/Eucharist, 8:00 a.m./10:00 A.M.
Revised Common Lectionary (Yr. A, Pr. 11): **Matthew 9:35-10:8**
Preacher: Gerry Mueller

A couple of Sunday's ago I and some others from this Parish were at the ordination of Brent Krysa as a Deacon of the Church, and I remembered that 38 years plus two days ago I was in the same Cathedral Church, also being ordained a Deacon. Aside from a completely renovated St. Paul's Cathedral (a great improvement!) and a modestly changed ordination liturgy, I was surprised by one difference from my earlier experience; there was no money offering taken up at the Offertory. **That** got me thinking. (And then just yesterday, after I'd mostly finished this sermon, I read the essay by Rev. Kevin Dixon that Rev. Margaret linked to in her weekly newsletter, and thought the stars had definitely aligned.)

We Anglicans are not very good at talking about the money needs of the church to exist, to worship, and to do mission in our world. We tend to be very subtle and soft-spoken when money is the subject.

There was only one (failed) attempt that I know of to become somewhat more "in your face". That was a bumper sticker proposed to a General Synod in the 1980s, and I only saw one example in the office of a cleric who had been at that Synod. I asked him "how come?" that bumper sticker was nowhere seen, especially not on Anglican cars. Seemingly it had been considered too controversial and "likely to offend people". So, **what** did it say?

Tithe if you love Jesus; anybody can honk!

There, I've done it, I've used the T-word! We Anglicans are very reluctant to use **that** word, but it **does** come up, usually carefully paraphrased and hidden in some report of yet another planning exercise. But it's been there, and it will be there again!

How am I so sure of that? I've been around this block several times in 38 years. In 1990 the Synod of the Diocese of Huron passed "Vision 2001"; one **simple** vision, with six goals, each with three to six objectives having five to fifteen strategies. I never did see how that all worked out. I escaped to the Diocese of Toronto, just in time to be caught up in a similar exercise there; but with Toronto almost twice the size of Huron, more goals, more objectives, and more strategies. After one more Toronto exercise, which actually made **positive** changes to how that Diocese operates, I returned to Huron 10 year later, in 2001 (and saw no evidence that Vision 2001 had ever existed) just in time for "Imagine Huron", and retired in time to avoid its successor.

In all these planning exercises, **tithing** was eventually identified as a goal or strategy (often avoiding the T-word with language like "proportional giving"); and I'm **betting** it will be again in similar plans. And, for my sins, over my time in ordained ministry in two dioceses I was part of several focus groups that hotly debated what tithing meant. We all agreed that it meant giving 10% (or even just some percent) of **something**, but a percentage of **what**? Some argued for gross family income. Others proposed net income, after taxes

and deductions. Still others wanted "disposable" income, after necessary expenses; and that started a whole new debate about what was "necessary". Very quickly a biblical principle, that we ought to return roughly one tenth of **everything** God has given us to God's work, turned into clever accounting and nitpicking. And while I'm still prepared to argue for the biblical norm of giving 10% to the work of the church and for ministry to those less fortunate than us, I also argue that **most of us** have already given to ministry to the sick, the poor, the hungry and the stranger through our income and property taxes. (There were no such taxes in biblical times, and the tithe had to cover everything!) But I don't know and can't calculate (maybe a tax accountant could) how much of the biblical 10% is covered by what fraction of our taxes! (And not to brag or try to motivate by guilt, I **do** give away roughly 10% of my after-tax income, **but** not all to the church, but also to groups and causes that I think are good for us as a society and a country, education being a foremost priority. Equally importantly, I try to do the same with my time, and also not only to the church.)

As you can see, any debate about giving to the work of the church can very quickly turn into mathematical arguments about percentages and joyless penny-counting. Nevertheless, I would like to take some time to talk about some of the principles behind giving to the work of the Church.

Some words of our Lord to the disciples he is sending out in today's reading from the Gospel of Matthew are relevant;

You received without payment, give without payment. [10:8b]

This text is one of the few for which I prefer the version of the King James Bible;

Freely ye have received, freely give.

I don't want to do violence to this text, so let me begin by saying that in their context these words have **nothing** to do with money. The passage begins with a description of Jesus' ministry; preaching the Gospel and healing. There is more than a strong hint that the amount of work to be done is too much, and he prays that other workers will be found. Jesus then appoints the twelve as his delegates, giving them his own authority to preach and heal - that is what **apostle** means, someone with the authority of the one who sends them.

It is the message of the Gospel, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand," that they have received freely. They are to pass that on, freely, not expecting reward. Jesus is talking about **evangelism**, the spreading of the Gospel, **not** money. Nevertheless, there is an important message for us, and for our commitment to the work of the Church, in this saying of the Lord,

Freely ye have received, freely give.

Each of us has received freely from God. First, there is the material world. All that exists is created by God and belongs to God. That includes ourselves, our very lives, all our time, and everything that we call ours. All we enjoy during life, even life itself, is a loan from God. We bring **nothing** into this world, and we take **nothing** from it.

Equally importantly, there is the spiritual realm. We mortal humans have a yearning for eternity, a yearning for God. We are flesh, yet we feel within us a spirit, a soul, that **needs** God. We also recognize that God is distant, holy; **we** can never with our own effort approach God. It is God that has to come to **us**; God has to **give** us the great gift of God. Thus the Gospel teaches us that God became **human**, lived and died as one of us, and through that life and death made it possible for us to **know** God. Call it the "kingdom of God," call it "eternal life," or "redemption" or "salvation", God has **given** it to us, freely.

These are the gifts of the Gospel; **all** that we are and **all** that we have comes from God, and God has redeemed us from our own sinful mortality. **That** is what we have freely received. And **that** is what we are to pass freely on to others, by our words, and by our witness. Others need to **hear** this Good News, and more importantly, others need to **experience** this Good News.

How do we pass on this Good News? Jesus is our model. He preached, but more importantly, he practiced what he preached. He preached the coming kingdom, and he showed what that kingdom was like by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and accepting outcasts and sinners as his equals. I suggest that none of the preaching of Jesus would have been accepted or remembered if he had not done his works of ministry. **We** are to do the same.

Proclamation is fine, but actions speak louder. If **one** picture is worth a **thousand** words, then **one** caring deed done in the name of Jesus must be worth a **million** words of simply telling people about the love of God. All of our **preaching** about the Gospel is worthless unless we **live** the Gospel. It is by our words and actions that we bear witness in the world to the transforming power of God's love. And, we are to do this **freely**. Paradoxically, doing this costs **money!**

That is why I think the arguments about what portion of our incomes we should give become petty and legalistic. What we return to the work of God from all that God has given to us is part of our **witness** to the world. The principle of the tithe, 10%, is useful as a guideline and one towards which we can strive, but unless it is given freely and lovingly, it is not much of a witness to the freedom and love we have in God. **Whatever** we return to God, in our gifts to charities and the church, from our material goods, from our time, from our lives, is a statement we make about how we feel

about **all** that God has freely given us. We all need to consider from time to time if we are making the statement we want to make.

Consider for a moment our church, here. By simply standing on Mill Street it is a witness to the Christian faith to all that pass. But what sort of witness is it? If it looks well kept, clean, with the grass neat and plants well-cared for, it says that those who worship here care; this building is **important** to them. If the building is shabby and the property messy, it witnesses to its unimportance in their lives. What **kind** of witness do you want this building to be?

Or consider two main charities of our Church; Alongside Hope (formerly the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund) and the Anglican Foundation. If they **can** provide emergency relief in needing communities and countries as necessary, if they **can** be there with assistance when a natural disaster strikes, that says something about how seriously Anglican Christians in Canada take their responsibility to feed the hungry, to take care of those in need. If they **can't**, because funds are not available, that also makes a statement. What kind of statement do **you** want to make?

I could multiply these examples endlessly, but I hope you can do so on your own, from your own experience, and from your own priorities. Our commitment to the work of the church and other caring agencies in time and money is part of our Christian witness to the

power of the Gospel. Is it the kind of witness you want to make?
Are we giving back **freely**, when so much has been **given** to us?

These **are** questions worth thinking about from time to time.