

**St. Paul's Anglican Church**  
**The Sunday Next Before Advent – (Stewardship Sunday)**  
**Nov. 25, 2018**

**Postulant Dennis Ryan**

Good morning, today, the Sunday next before Advent, is also called “Stir-up Sunday. It was called this not only because the first two words of today’s collect are “stir up,” but also because it was commonly a day when children were taught how to make or stir up the ingredients for the Christmas puddings. However, it is also an applicable title because today is the day that we at St. Paul’s annually stir up ourselves about stewardship. Stewardship is, according to Dictionary.com, “the responsible overseeing and protection of something considered worth caring for and preserving.” In this case, we are talking about stewardship of the Church. When we say the “stewardship of Church”, we may think that we are just talking about the maintenance and upkeep of the buildings and covering the operating costs of St. Paul’s. Certainly, that is an important and necessary part of stewardship and having clean, well-kept facilities and an efficient administrative operation is conducive to our mission and our worship.

But let us consider that the Church is not just a building or even the physical administration of our parish. In Matthew chapter 16 Jesus asks His disciples “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” Simon answers “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus essentially says you are right and then continues “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church...” The meaning of the name Peter is a stone or rock. Consider that the foundation of the Christian Church is the that Christ is the Son of the Living God and the reason Simon was called a rock was that he first acknowledged the reality of the true Messiah.

Every rock in the foundation of the Church is a person who accepts Christ as the Son of the Living God. What we are saying is that the foundation of the Church is not the cement “rock” underneath this building but is each and every individual person that believes in Jesus Christ. Therefore, let us restate our definition of stewardship to be responsible for people, all of whom are worthy of care and preserving. Thus, the Church we are talking about is St. Paul’s, and it is the Diocese, and the Province and the whole Body of Christ, and even beyond.

So, let us talk about people for a bit and specifically the people we see in today’s Gospel lesson from John about the famous feeding of the 5000. Actually, Matthew’s Gospel tells us that the term “men” did not include the women and children. Therefore, we know that it was a lot of people, probably much more than 5000. Why were all these people here? John 6:2 which we did not read tells us that they had followed him because they had seen His miracles on those whom were diseased. Some perhaps had diseases they wanted healed but many, we can suppose, just wanted to learn more about this man, Jesus. We know at least a12 of them were formal disciples, but Jesus had many other disciples as well. After all, a disciple is one who follows a teacher in order to learn. Jesus was somebody they wanted to learn from and whom they were thinking about.

We know several other things about these people. One was that they were investing their time, after all they followed Him around and across the Sea of Galilee to what was essentially the middle of nowhere. They did so with apparently not much concern for some of life’s necessities because there wasn’t enough food for the crowd even if they did have the money to purchase it.

We also know of one young man, a boy actually, who did have a meager lunch or dinner with him. Even better that boy was willing to

share it with others. We can probably also suspect that the food the boy had, was all that he had.

So, collectively the people are focusing their minds on Jesus as they invest their time to be with Him and are willing to share, maybe all, they have for Him. When you stop to think about it, that is about all we have that we can bring to any situation, our thoughts, our time, and our resources. There is a name to describe what we think about, spend time on and devote our money and resources to and that name is a “priority.” A priority has no connotation of goodness or badness connected with it – it is just a descriptor. We are the ones who have to determine their relative importance. We all have a list of our priorities and frequently the order of a priority changes position on our list. Not all of our priorities are ones that we would select, they are thrust upon us by other circumstances, but in the end, it is our choice what we think about, how we spend our time and upon what we spend our money.

For the people in today’s Gospel, on that day for whatever amount of time, their priority was Jesus. However, there is at least one other lesson we can glean from this event. Notice that after Jesus received the fish and bread and gave thanks, he then distributed it to the disciples for them to pass out to the multitude. Jesus performed the miracle but did not individually give every person a share, no, He used others, the 12 disciples, to pass out the food. God is the only one who can perform miracles, sometimes He does it directly, but many times, perhaps even most of the time, He uses the Body of Christ, the Church, individual human beings to pass the miracle to others. Jesus uses individual human beings as His hands and feet. Why does He do that? We can think of many reasons, but one might be that as we prepare to join him in the Lord’s Supper so can we join Him at other times as well.

We’ll come back to the Gospel in a minute but let’s take a moment to reflect on focus and activity, or shall we say thought and action. Let

us say that we spend 1.5 hours a week in church thinking about God and an average life is 80 years. That means in our lifetime we have spent 6240 hours focusing on God, seems like a lot until we consider that in 80 years we will live 698,880 hours. But you say I spend time every day praying and meditating on the Lord. Ok, if we each spend an hour a day outside of church in such activity, we would spend 8.5 hours a week or 35,360 hours in a lifetime focusing on God. Much better and if we do so it would raise our time devoted to God from .009% all the way up to .05%. Is 1/20<sup>th</sup> of our time and activity sufficient to prepare us for the rest of eternity? It may be, the answer is only of concern between each of us individually and God. The point of the question is to give us a starting point when we reflect on our priorities.

In addition to amount of time, let's talk about what we do with our time. We have heard over the past three weeks, Laura and Lance, tell us of some of the activities that they are involved with in service to the Church, the Body of Christ. We all were impressed with their accomplishments and I know I felt that there was no way I could do some of the things that they have done. However, let's focus on not only what can be done but also the range of things that are available to do within the Church. St. Paul's has 9 major committees and 28 subcommittees to address the operation, administration, maintenance and ministries of the church. Some require specific talents or technical capabilities while most of the others require just a caring soul. All require people with a willingness to serve. These committees and subcommittees are really only the beginning, the Apostle Paul tells us that we each being something unique to the Body of Christ. You may have an idea for a ministry or function that we are not doing now. Please bring it forth and the Rector, Father Tom, and the vestry will consider how to put it into action. It was Wayne Gretzky, the hockey player, who said "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take." We miss 100% of the

ministries we don't start or participate in.

Let's return to our Gospel for today. There was one very significant item about the feeding of the 5000 at the conclusion of the lesson. There were 12 baskets full of leftover fragments of the barley loaves after all had eaten. Earlier we recalled the activities Laura and Lance have done in their ministries. They also spoke of the blessings they have received as a result of their ministries – their individual basket of fragments, so to speak. Stewardship is not undertaken for a “basket of fragments,” rather it is a blessing both given and received.

One final comment before we close. Although the Body of Christ are the hands and feet of Christ and He gave us His all, it is not the amount or specific percentage of our priorities of thought, time and resources we contribute to the Body of Christ, it is if what is offered are our “first fruits” or are they the left-overs. Moses in Deuteronomy 26:2 says, “You shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from your land that the Lord your God gives you, and you shall put it in a basket, and you shall go to the place which the Lord your God will choose, to make His name dwell there.”

In Zell an der Mosel, Germany, a statue of Christ lost its hands during a World War II bombing raid. On the wall beside the statue is a sign that reads: “Christ has no hands but yours.”

**STIR up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

**Amen.**