

Sermon  
23 Pentecost—Proper 26-B-2  
Stewardship  
St. Andrew's, Methuen  
October 31, 2021  
William Bradbury

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Psalm 119:1-8

Hebrews 9:11-14

Mark 12:28-34

At the end of the 2004 movie "The Aviator", aging billionaire Howard Hughes, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, has locked himself in a small room in his mansion, and is constantly wiping his hands and blowing his nose in hopes of keeping germs at bay.

One of the richest men in the world, known for his creativity and courage, is now held hostage by his fear.

**As we know in this age of Covid, germs are dangerous things, yet the germs aren't ruining his life: his mindset of fear is ruining his life.**

He has everything, but he enjoys nothing.

He lives in the midst of abundance, but he thinks he is surrounded by scarcity because he is being run by a mindset of fear.

**You and I live also live in fear when we live in the midst of Abundance and but act as if we are surrounded by scarcity.**

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**To counter this, we need to relearn the practice of gratitude.**

I've mentioned before that in July 2008 my daughter, Katie, who was teaching in Florida was in a car accident on her way to church. I knew the nightmare of every parent when their child is in a coma on a ventilator in ICU.

But as she started her slow climb back to full health, I experienced a flood of gratitude. I was grateful for the first responders; I was grateful to the nurses and doctors in the Emergency Department. I was also grateful to the woman who came in everyday to fill Katie's ice pitcher and the man who swept the floor.

I saw that each of these strangers were an essential part of the Web of Life that was healing my daughter—out of the sheer grace.

It's easy to be grateful as healing comes. But I've also seen gratitude in parents whose children never made it out of the hospital.

**After fears about our family, one of the things we worry about the most is our money, even when we have enough.** Of course, instead of making us feel better, this worry makes us feel worse. As we focus our attention on what we don't have now and what we may not have in the future and **we go blind to what we do have in this moment.**

**We, like Howard Hughes are living in abundance but we are living out of a mindset of scarcity.**

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 As I said last year: In the Fall of 1979 I attended a Stewardship conference at St. Philip's Cathedral in Atlanta. I was recently ordained, recently married, and buried under a pile of debt. As a child I had been taught to believe in the illusion of scarcity, so I was always anxious about money. My father kept telling me: **"A fool and his money are soon part."**

**Now I had the perfect excuse to be stingy:** I was a priest giving my life to God, so I didn't need to show gratitude with my money, only with my time and talent.

As the conference leader talked, I found myself getting really angry. He said "time, talent, and treasure" isn't a "choose one" option. He said in our financial pledge we are to give out of gratitude and not out of fear.

He said clergy need to join with the vestry in setting the example in giving. He reminded us that the Biblical standard was to give 10% back to God's work, which is actually a pretty good deal since we get to use the other 90%.

He said, "Figure out the percentage you are currently giving to the church and each year raise it by one or two percent till you reach your goal. If every church member did this, every Episcopal Church would be able to do amazing things for Christ and their neighbors, and there'd be no need for all those spaghetti supper fundraisers during the year.

**I got angry and stormed out.** I drove home in a rage. By the next morning, however, I knew who I was mad at: I was mad at myself. I was mad I was letting my fear of giving, rob me of the joy of living with gratitude.

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 We are all like the Sea of Galilee: full of abundance. But when fear closes our hearts we stop living out of gratitude and we shut down our giving.

And when we stop letting life flow out of us we've stopped loving God and neighbor—**and we slowly turn into the Dead Sea.**

The Dead Sea is dead, not because it doesn't get fresh water. Like the Sea of Galilee above it, the Jordan River flows into it every day. **The Dead Sea is dead, not because it doesn't get fresh water, but because it doesn't GIVE away its water.**

**It stops the flow and it dies.**

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**Giving is the only way to keep our abundant life flowing.** Victoria Castle in her book, *The Trance of Scarcity* says that **"giving is pure pleasure. It's a creative, spontaneous act, never an obligation. Giving is the exhalation that makes room for the next inhalation."**  
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**Therefore, Jesus is not interested in making us rich in getting, but making us rich in giving— That's why stewardship at St. Andrew's is not about fund-raising but about faith-raising.**

Bishop Bill Burrill some years ago said that when ushers pass the plate, they are not taking up a collection—**you collect garbage—rather we are making an offering—not a tip for a nice worship service, but a self-offering in gratitude to Christ—to Christ who gives himself completely to us.**

**I implore you to give to the church, not as a tip for good service, but as a tangible** symbol of your gratitude to Christ for giving everything to you.

Don't give until it hurts—give until it feels good.

Catholic monk Martin Luther, who on October 31, 1517, kicked off the Protestant Reformation, said, "A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing."

**Our stewardship is not about fund-raising but about faith-raising.**

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Therefore, before you fill out your pledge card, I encourage you to get quiet in God's presence and reflect on your gratitude for your relationship with Christ and His Church. Then, with your heart open, take a moment, to

figure out what percentage of your income you are currently giving to the church and how that expresses your gratitude to God for all the blessings of your life. (Studies show that Episcopalians on average give between 2% and 3% of their income to their church.)

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**Martin Luther also said, "Show me where a man spends his time & money, and I'll show you his god."**

Or as Jesus puts it, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Filling out our pledge card this year gives us all an opportunity to practice gratitude and to express more fully our love toward our neighbor and our God.