



## **Christian Stewardship 2020**

I really hate talking about money.

At home, money is something I leave up to my wife to sort out.

So, having to preach about money, today, really does not come easily to me, and I would rather not do it. In fact, I would rather do just about almost anything else, than stand in this pulpit and talk about it.

The Diocese of Peterborough, from which I came to the Diocese of London ten years ago, is twinned with the Diocese of Bungoma in Kenya.

Bungoma lies on the Ugandan border and was founded as a missionary diocese in 1996.

Each year, an exchange of clergy and lay people would take place between the two dioceses helping to establish links and partnerships to establish and strengthen bonds of trust and friendship and mutual support.

Shortly after becoming the Rural Dean of Rutland, I hosted a group of people visiting from Bungoma and chaired a question and answer session for the deanery synod in a local village hall.

*“What is the main difference between Bungoma and Peterborough?”* asked one deanery synod representative. Without hesitation, one of our African visitors quickly answered, *“In England, you are always asking God for things; in Kenya, we just thank God for what we have!”*

It was a humbling reply, an answer which could very easily have closed down the question and answer session, but instead, it opened up a mutually enriching conversation about prayer and trust and faith and God's gracious, faithful goodness towards us; it raises the question for *us*: how do *we* show our gratitude and share what we have.

The Parochial Church Council has been giving this question some serious thought, and today I'm inviting you to join them.

So, when you arrived this morning, each of you was given an envelope along with your books and weekly bulletin sheet. I do not want you to open them now, nor to read them now if you have already opened them. Please take them home and do that.

The new blue booklet inside your pack is entitled "*Our Duty and our Joy*" and it talks about Christian Giving and Stewardship – how we respond to the God who has given us everything.

The title comes from one of our Eucharistic Prayers – one of our Prayers of Thanksgiving – for that is what 'Eucharist' means – derived from the Greek word 'Eucharisto' or 'Efcharisto' meaning "Thank you".

Every time we meet together as God's people, we give God thanks – we say "Thank you" We do so, because there is nothing else we can give God, because *all* that we have comes from God; because God alone is the source of our life and our being; all that we are is God's; everything that we have comes *from* God.

As the visiting group from Bungoma understood so well, we cannot give the God who gives us everything anything – anything that is except thanks and praise, thanks and praise returned to God in worship and in how we live our day to lives between our acts of coming together to say 'thank you' by breaking bread and sharing a cup of wine – *the* "Thanksgiving", our duty and our joy at all times and in all places.

Ten years ago, the then assistant curate and wardens of St Marylebone spoke about money and they did so because a new Rector was coming to town. Me!

Since then, I have never spoken to you about money, although, many, many, times I have tried to speak to you about the God whose love has spoken us into being; the God whose love sustains *in* being; the God who in and through love, draws us every more deeply into the perfect love we call Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Lots of people, inside - and especially outside - the Church, think that a parish like St Marylebone is 'rolling in it', that it is funded by "other people". "Other people" such as the government, or the local authority, or the Church Commissioners, or The Church of England, or even the Diocese of London. But the truth, could not be more different.

Every penny we spend we have to raise. Every single penny!

Everything we do, we have to pay for ourselves: clergy, organists, singers, buildings team, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, painting and decorating and repairs, toilet rolls, electricity, gas, water, rubbish collection, flowers, tea, coffee. If it costs money we have to find the money to pay for it because it really does not come from anywhere else. Oh, and we have to pay for the recruitment and training of clergy and make a substantial contribution towards the running costs of the Diocese of London of which we are a part.

Charles Dickens, himself a parishioner of St Marylebone, wrote these very familiar words whilst living right next door to this building in 1849:

*"Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen [pounds] nineteen [shillings] and six [pence], result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery."*

Times don't change, how one manages money doesn't change, although our annual expenditure is now rather more than nineteen pounds, nineteen shillings and six pence!"

If we are to continue providing beautiful worship, engaging children's work, providing two Outstanding schools, a home for a 10,000 patient NHS Primary Care Practice, offering low-cost and no-cost psychotherapy and counselling; if we are to go on building and shaping and sustaining community life in central London through caring for people living with dementia, coping with loneliness and visual impairment; if we are to keep this monumental grade 1-listed landmark building standing *and open* 365 days a year, lit, heated and accessible, we – every one of us here – has to show our thankfulness to God who has provided *us* with everything by giving something back.

The 'norm' for Christian giving has always been for Christians to give back to God 10% of their income in the form of a 'tithe'. Many Christians still do precisely this; others will give 5% to the work of the Church and 5% to other charities, some give considerably more; but there are many people who come to St Marylebone Parish Church who give nothing, who put nothing in the plate/bag on a Sunday.

It is a fact that very few regular worshippers at St Marylebone have Standing Orders so that, even if you are not here on a Sunday, the parish church can still receive your *thank-offering*, your "monetary thank you" to the God who has given you everything.

A few Sundays ago, at the 8.30 am service, when there were 36 adults in the congregation and 33 children in the 8.30 am Young Church gathering, the collection plate when it was brought up contained just two gifts – one yellow Gift Aid envelope and a single £5 note.

Perhaps people who come to St Marylebone don't give because they have never been asked, or because they think the money we need to exist comes from elsewhere.

As your Rector, ten years on since the PCC ‘talked money’, I appeal to you, to think really seriously about your giving; I ask you to stop and pray and reflect and to work out how much you can give each week or each month in response to all that God has given you.

Some of you already give very generously. We would not be here if you did not. Thank you!

But we are a thriving, flourishing community of faith, one of the largest congregations in the Diocese of London. We are a place where lives are changed every day, but if this is to continue, each and every one of us has to play our part and each of us has to take Dickens’ challenge seriously and do something practical and positive about it.

*“It is our duty and our joy, at all times and in all places, to give thee thanks and praise, O God”* for *“all things come from thee and of our own do we give thee”* – preferably Gift Aided!