

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως
Proper 27-C; 10 November 2019
St. Thomas', Glassboro – Todd Foster
(rev. 201911091427)

Stewardship Kickoff

In nomine...

I. Intro

When some friends and I discussed today's Gospel passage in Bible Study a couple weeks ago, Mother Susan, the Rector of Good Shepherd, Pitman, said, "My God, did anyone ask the woman?" Did she have any say in this whole sordid affair? All those brothers deserved to die childless! She was probably asking herself, "Will these brothers never end?" "She was glad to finally leave the planet."

I was dying. I loved it! This is why it's important to study the Bible with people with a variety of points of view! God meets us each one in different ways: and so my understanding of God will remain stunted and woefully incomplete if I don't get to see God through your eyes as well! That's why we gather as Christ's Church.

However, my purpose this *morning* is not to talk about the Sadducees and their argument with Jesus. Our work here today is to kick off our pledge campaign as we look forward to what God will do among us here at St. Thomas' in 2020.

II. Thesis

The mission of St. Thomas', the mission of our Diocese, as our Bishop reminded us at Convocation meeting just a couple weeks ago, is to make disciples of Jesus Christ who will participate in God's mission of reconciliation in the world. Our primary work as a church is to make disciples. As we do that, we will see those disciples, us, bringing positive change to the world around us.

A pledge campaign is an important part of that process of making disciples. Disciples follow Jesus. We don't just assent to certain truths. We don't just gather for certain rites and rituals. We follow Jesus in the ways we spend our time, our energy, our attention, our passion, and our money.

My invitation to you is two-fold.

First, you should find in the pew in front of you yellow cards with some strange looking letters on the top. What you see sticking out is the Greek word, Εὐχαριστοῦμεν. There's a translation further down on the card. It means "We give thanks." The *Eucharist* that we celebrate every week is, literally, "the thanksgiving." That's what we do as Christians and as Episcopalians when we gather together. We give thanks.

What has God done in your life this year for which you are thankful? Where have you experienced God's presence? How has God reached out to you, personally, to express God's love and care and concern for you? Write it on the card. You can do it right now if the homily is getting too long! You don't have to put your name on it. Just put it in the offering plate when it comes by. Your thanksgiving will sit on the altar as we offer the Great Thanksgiving together, a collection of our specific thanksgivings to God.

These cards will be available all three Sundays of our Stewardship season. As has been done in the past here at St. Thomas', we'll collect what they say and make a little booklet listing all the things for which we, as a community, are thankful.

My second invitation is this. Fill out a pledge card. Many of you have already received one in the mail. A few more might come in this week. If you don't get one in the mail, ask me for one and, when you fill it out, write your address on it. That will automatically put you on the list for next year. You can put your card in the offering plate, mail it in, or hold onto it for our big in-gathering in two weeks, on Christ the King Sunday, the 24th of November.

My advice for you, as you fill out that card, is the same as it was last year:

1. I invite and encourage *everyone* to pledge. We're looking for 100% participation. If, looking back over the last year, if God has been present in your life and you want to take part in God's redeeming activity in the world through the community of St. Thomas', making a pledge is exactly how you do that. Pledging is spiritual work, and I'm assuming that a desire to do spiritual work is what brought most of you here today!

2. I invite everyone to pledge in proportion to what you have, not to what you don't have. God gave you what you have, and it is only from what you were given that you are invited to give back to the work of God's kingdom. On the back of the pledge card is a chart to help you do that. The word "tithe" means 10%, and that is a worthy goal toward which very many people reach, growing in our giving year by year.

3. I invite you to give first to God. Don't be bringing your leftovers: who ever has leftovers? When you get a paycheck, take the first-fruits and offer them to God. Do your giving first, thus dedicating the whole check to God's work, and you will be empowered to spend the rest of the check with an easy conscience, knowing that you have already spoken your values and your faith with that paycheck.

Here's how these three ideas have played out in my life this year:

The Vestry and Stewardship Committee have already turned in their pledge cards – and I did along with them. We're all answering the call to 100% participation. My wife Becky and I keep a common bank account, so we fill in just one pledge card for our whole family.

We also practice proportional giving. When I filled out my pledge card last month, I bumped it up a bit from where it was last year, to reflect the Cost of Living increase I received in my paycheck. We give 15% of our pre-tax income, most of which goes to St. Thomas'. We also save a little to give to other worthy causes.

Finally, we practice giving first. When it was time to pledge, we sat down and worked out our annual budget. Giving was at the top of the list. We live that out month by month by instructing our bank to automatically send a check directly to St. Thomas' each month: that's why you'll almost never see me put anything into the offering plate. When a car repair or other unexpected expense comes along, we find the money for it somewhere else. Because we have already given first to St. Thomas'.

III. Invitation

In a few weeks, the Finance Committee will sit down to recommend a budget for 2020. Then the Vestry will take it up, make some adjustments, and approve it. And that will all be based on what you, St. Thomas', have told us with your pledges. How you see God at work in your lives and in our church. And how much you want to participate in that movement of God.

Jesus' invitation is not necessarily an easy thing. It's uncomfortable for most of us. But that doesn't make it any less good or life-giving. Like the Sadducees, we are being invited out of a false story-line about money and wealth and scarcity, and into a better story about God's Kingdom and our belovedness. See the places where that story has already begun to be written in your life. And then, I invite you: take a pledge card and write yourself into that story.

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