

## First Sunday of Stewardship Campaign, 2025

*Where your treasure is, there is your heart.*

Where your treasure is, says Jesus, there is your heart.

There are some people who will tell you that vicars are always talking about money. Always *asking* for money.

I don't think that's true. I think people remember it when we do; I think people often don't like it when we do, and so it stands out, but we actually don't do it very often.

Certainly not as often as Jesus did. He had lots to say about money. Money, for him, told you a great deal about a person. Where your treasure is, he said, there is your heart.

So no apologies for this, one of my really rather occasional sermons about money.

And the first thing to say is: the reason we talk about money is not just to get you to give to the church, so we can balance the books. Next week, Tom will talk about all of that – and it is important, and it is true. But it's not the *key* reason we talk about money. The key reason we talk about money is because Jesus did. Because it is a spiritual issue. It is part of taking God seriously. Even if the parish had all the money in the world, which we certainly don't, you would still need a sermon like this one. A sermon about generosity: about why we give, and how we give.

## Why do we give?

So first, why do we give? Well, I hope there are many things about this parish that you value: our buildings. Our choir. Our groups. Our services. The fact that people of all sorts can find help and comfort here, that people learn to pray, that we're always open, here, welcoming to everyone. Now, none of that comes for free. We don't get a penny of Government support, or from the bigger Church of England – indeed, we pay in to make sure other places can have churches too. So if you value what happens here, and you want to see it continue – and do more than continue, see it grow and flourish, you need to give.

But, once again, these are not the most basic reason for giving. The most basic is that man there, on the Cross, giving everything He had, giving Himself. Every week, we hear those words, don't we: this is my body, given for you. This is my blood, shed for you. And the whole point of being here is to become more like him, more and more people who give, give radically. Who give more than money, of course. Who give time, love, effort, care, who give themselves to those in need. It's far more than money. But it does *involve* money, and that involvement is one of the most fundamental steps in the journey of becoming like Jesus. As the Lord said, we tend to love our money. And if we're going to do what he said – love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and love our neighbour as ourselves – it's going to involve loving our money less. Making it serve that bigger love. Giving it away.

Which means, that in all normal circumstances, one of the ways in which you can tell how Christian someone is, is to ask how generous they are. What are they doing with their money? We give because we love God, and we love our neighbours, more than we love our money.

That's *why*, what about *how*? How to give? What to, and how much?

**What to?** It drives me mad when preachers talk about giving, and all they really mean is giving to the Church. Now, of course, you should give to the Church. However, the idea that Christian giving stops there is utterly wrong. God cares about prisoners, about the hungry, about the homeless, at least as much He does the Church. Your giving should reflect that. If we're not as seriously generous to the poor, as we are to the church, that is a sin. So take these weeks, when we're thinking about money, as an opportunity to think about *all* your giving, not just church giving. Generally speaking, as you grow as a Christian, it should all be getting more and more generous.

Which leads us to, **how much?**

And the answer is: I don't know. That's between you and God. Some Christians say, ten percent of your income. Others say five. I don't say either. I think everyone's circumstances are so different that any general rule is a bit hopeless. Maybe you should be giving more than ten percent! Or maybe a good deal less. In fact, it might even be true that some of you need to give less than you do now. If your debt is out of control, if you're struggling to keep food on the table, if you have serious family obligations, the last thing you should do is give more to the church. Please hear this: you might need to give less. Do not feel guilty if that is so.

However, many of us *could* give more. So how much? What's the right figure? Well, once again, that's for you and God. I can tell you, though, the right questions to ask yourself. If you seriously grapple with these questions, with what I call the 4 Rs of giving, then whatever you give, at least you know you're being seriously Christian about your money. And that is what God wants.

**So, the 4 'R's. Number one - R is for Regular.** Whatever I give, do I give it predictably, week by week, month by month? Or just .... when I remember? Or .... when I actually turn up? No organisation can run on that basis, not even a church. We couldn't plan anything. So whatever you give, if you possibly can, give it regularly. By far and away the best way to do that is to what most of our givers have already done: join the Parish Giving Scheme. It's so easy to do it. It does not cost a single penny and, crucially, it is so easy for our volunteers to administer. So please join. Make your giving *regular*.

**Number 2: R is for Reviewed.** That is, do I go back, each year, and ask myself is my giving right for now? £5 a week was pretty generous thirty years ago when you had a mortgage and kids at home and all sorts of demands, and, bluntly, also, when £5 was worth a lot more. But then if you just left it that way for the last thirty years – well life has changed and the value of money has changed. You're now being way less generous than you think – and not deliberately, but just through not paying attention. So number 2: is my giving *reviewed*?

**Number 3: R is for Real.** Does my giving actually say that I love? *Is* it generous? Or it is tokenistic? And this is not about the amount. To one person, £10 is spare change. To another, it is a fortune. God doesn't care about the amount. He does care what it means to you. Think of it this way, perhaps. Some wonderful morning all the money you've given in a year comes back to you, just like that. Sitting snugly in your bank account, for you to spend as you wish. Well, *would* that be wonderful? Would you think, 'wow, brilliant!'? Or, bluntly, would it not matter very much? That tells you whether your giving is *real*.

**Number 4: R is for Radical.** Or, perhaps better, R is for Ridiculous. Every so often, just once in a while, is my giving ridiculous? Just madly generous, in a completely unsustainable kind of way? Love's a bit like that, isn't it? It's not just about being steady and reliable and predictable and serious, though those things come first. Every so often love is ridiculous. And if our giving comes from love, it will have, occasionally, something of that character. Maybe at Christmas, or at Easter, we do an extra special gift. Or maybe, we look at our wills, and say, well, why not? Twenty percent, thirty percent of everything towards God, towards the church, towards the poor? Why not more?

The four 'R's: regular, reviewed, real, ridiculous. In these four weeks, I want to challenge each each of us, to think about our giving. To do more than think, in fact: to put those principles into action. To give more to this church; more to all God cares about. Where your treasure is, there is your heart. Let's make sure it's in the right place.