



Sunday, 26 May 2019 – Easter 6
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Readings: Acts of the Apostles 16:9-15; Gospel St John 14:23-29
Focusing on Stewardship
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

Gospel overview

The Gospel began with 'Jesus answered them'. He had called his disciples to follow him but they had questions: they weren't sure what was expected of them or who they were doing it for, or when. It's the ultimate 'Liaison Group', just like our own version here at St Andrew's where we talk together, ask questions and share our experience to enable our church life to flourish.

Answers for questions

How does Jesus answer their questions? He doesn't make them feel guilty for not grasping his words rather he keeps it simple, all that he says is: 'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them and we will come and make our home with them.' That's priceless! No matter who we love in this life, our spouse, family, friends or indeed what we love, home, hobbies and places, all these will pass away but if our Lord and Saviour and his heavenly Father make their home with us, that's a personal, eternal loving certainty.

Active response

In Acts, Lydia absolutely got it when Paul shared the scriptures and explained about the love of God through Christ. She was a successful business woman of high-end textiles – purple cloth no less - the stuff sold to emperors, kings and other luminaries. She grasped every word that Paul said and, as we heard, opened her heart to the Gospel of Christ. She then went further and made her home available to Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke, to make it their base for mission providing for their needs. She gave of her time, talents and treasure for use in God's service. And that absolutely sums up everything stewardship is all about.

Our time

We need to place God first in our lives and allow him to direct how we manage our time with our other commitments. As I said at the start of the service, I've discovered in drafting the 'Church Directory' just how much time many of you give individually to enable our church services and social events to function. Our time and our presence are vital for church flourishing.

Our talents

Talents are those individual skills with which God has blessed each one of us personally. I know from my many chats with you that you are all very talented people.

Collectively you have diverse gifts of administration, flower-arranging, music, leading intercessions, the welcome at the door, the hospitality table, changing the frontals, cleaning the church, I could go on and on. For me personally, I greatly value the encouragement and guidance that you give me with a word or a steer here and there for, together, we all help to make our church vibrant, welcoming and active in God's service. The access and hospitality improvements, we hope to develop, if we can afford them, could provide even more people with a place of community and God's love.

Our treasure

It's the 'M' word money! As Richard our Treasurer is on holiday, I won't give him apoplexy when I say now 'You may be giving too much money for your means', I don't know. What you give to the church is a matter between you and God, that's if you believe in him. It may be that you don't really know what you believe but come to church to be part of this worshipping community because you like the company, its values and consider it worthwhile. Whatever the reason, giving money to the church is a matter to reflect upon seriously and, if possible, prayerfully, as to why we give.

Why do we give?

If this church closed there would be an aching void in this parish both of community and sacred space. Our faith may be imperfect but if our heart is set on doing what is right by loving others, as Christ has loved us, then that is a priceless Gospel witness. If we have faith it's important to share it and ask God to direct what we can give. We are not always here, for instance, most of us, take an annual holiday: when we're not here, do we ensure that our collections are still maintained perhaps by the envelope system or, even better, a monthly standing order through the bank. The mission of this church has regular expenses and ideally, we need to match or exceed those costs with regular giving, however, at present we're struggling. But I go back to 'Are you giving too much money?' Perhaps you're asset rich, but cash poor. Please understand, I'm not wishing you gone but inevitably one day we will no longer be here. A legacy to the church goes a long way in God's service. Right now, however, your priceless treasure might be your time and your talents. If so, please pray for those of us who are opening our hearts to God to consider what more money we might give in his service.

Challenge

Stewardship is soul-searching stuff but, importantly, when we open our hearts to Jesus, he gives us permission to use our time, talents and treasure, as has integrity for our relationship with him: that makes us cheerful givers not guilty givers. Jesus said 'Those who love me will keep my word. As this season of Easter begins to draw to its close let us reflect that God first loved us; gave his Son to die for us and redeem us, hence, he calls us to share his love with others. In a world that at times seems apathetic or worse antagonistic to Christian beliefs, to be a faithful disciple of Christ is challenging. The fact is such people won't know what they're missing if we don't share it with them.

Action

To close, I use words I read recently to form a prayer for us, our church life and growth. Doing things for God comes in three stages: first: it's impossible! second: it's difficult; third: it's done! Amen.