

A HOMILY BY RICHARD B. TUDOR
October 11, 2020 * 19th Pentecost * Proper 23A

I'm sure that you have all been anxiously checking your mailboxes daily for a letter from the church, that important letter with your pledge card for 2021. Don't worry! It will be in the mail soon. This is the time of the year when parishes hold their annual stewardship drives, so it seemed to me that that is what I ought to talk about this morning, our financial support of the church. Or to put it more plainly, MONEY!

It seems fair to say that money poses a problem of some kind for most people. For the great majority the problem is not having enough of it. Lotteries and gambling feed off the almost universal dream of having more money than you would know what to do with. The English playwright, Mr. George Bernard Shaw, once observed that, from his experience, it was the lack of money and not the love of money that was the root of all evil. Since this is an area in which almost everyone seems to struggle in one way or another, it seems to me that the church has a God-given responsibility to say something meaningful on the subject. I will attempt to do so by telling you a parable.

A Modern Parable

This is the story of Father Stray and how he cast his bread upon the waters, after which it came back to him. He – Father Stray – was the Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Brunswick, Maine back in the 1930's.

There are in Maine a number of historical churches which are kept in condition for mostly a single program during the Summer. The Head Tide Meeting House, a Congregational Church, was one of those places. Knowing full well that it was an honor for an Episcopal priest to be invited to preach at Head Tide, upon receiving an invitation, Father Stray accepted and as the day approached, he worked studiously on his sermon. He had arranged on the appointed Sunday to have his own service conducted by lay leaders. On the beautiful Sunday morning which favored the Head Tide committee, he took his small niece along for company and set out in his automobile in an easterly direction.

He came to Bath, Maine and then crossed the Kennebec River on an old ferry boat. He then proceeded to Wiscasset and on up the river. At the Head Tide Meeting House, he drove his car into the shade of some large trees. After making sure that his picnic lunch would remain in the shade, he took his little niece by the hand and walked up to the entrance of the meeting house. On the front steps, he was briefed by the local committee, and hearing the strains of the organ prelude beginning, he went inside.

In the entry way (narthex), there was a contribution box on a stand. Father Stray paused to fish in his pocket for some money. He was dismayed to discover that, after having purchased his return trip ticket on the ferry boat, his finances had been reduced to a fifty-cent piece. He didn't consider that ample enough, but it was all he had and so he discreetly dropped it in the box. Then he placed his niece in a front pew and took his seat behind the pulpit upon the platform.

As he sat there, he was pleased to notice a large congregation assembling. A good number were what are called “summer complaints” and hadn’t seen each other for a year. Consequently, there was much nodding and bowing. At the appointed hour, the church deacons closed the front doors and Father Stray arose to do what he had come to do. Perhaps he was challenged by the large congregation, but he thought to himself that he was doing much better than usual. The congregation was paying him rapt attention. Following his benediction, the deacons reopened the doors and another Head Tide annual meeting was over.

Father Stray, his niece at his side, stood on the front steps basking in the glow of a job well done, visiting with members of the congregation. As the people thinned out, a committeeman came forward and said, “Father, we don’t offer a gratuity, but over the years it has become customary to give our visiting preacher the contents of the collection box.” He gave him an envelope, and then, Father Stray and his niece went to retrieve their picnic lunch. While they were eating, he opened the envelope. It contained fifty cents. His niece looked at him and, with wisdom beyond her years, said, “Uncle Arthur, if you’d given more, you’d-a got more.”

I think that that is a great story, with a punch line filled with simple truth. If you’d given more, you’d-a got more. Can anyone dispute the fact that it is the real givers in life who receive back a richness in the quality of their lives?

“. . .make us continually to be given to good works,”

Collect, Proper 23

What can I say about the importance of strong concerned financial support of Trinity Church? The church is important because it connects its people – you and I – by a summons to holiness which involves belief and practice. The Christian is invited by God to enter into communion with the divine life (Jesus), a confrontation which challenges and transforms one’s whole being. The essential dimension of the life of holiness is stewardship. It involves how we use what we have - our time and resources – and the motivation behind that use. It breaks down to the disposition of our lives, i.e. what we do with them.

If we are in agreement about the pricelessness of the church and the relationships which it implants in our lives, then it seems logical to me to conclude that we must spare no effort in ensuring the continuing strong ministerial presence of the church. That’s our stewardship responsibility!

Certainly, we would be naïve if we weren’t aware that 2021 is going to be a challenging year! Unfortunately, we continue to be plagued by the menace of the covid-19 virus which has affected everyone’s lives, in many instances financially. I’m sure that you have noticed that the price of groceries has increased due to the epidemic. In addition to its normal budget costs for next year, Trinity Church has also decided to reconfigure its worship area and take some steps to “modernize” the nave and sanctuary. Two changes in the works are, (1) Replace the pews with chairs, and (2) Create a more dramatic presentation of the altar by lowering it and bringing it forward, closer to the congregation. It goes without saying that all this is going to cost money. But the church cannot just sit still. It feels called to make these changes even though it finds itself currently in a tough social situation. The church has to look ahead and plan for the future and that is what your leadership has decided to do. All of this is dependent on the willingness of

the congregation to assume the financial responsibility to pay for these changes. I think that we are confident that the people of Trinity will step up to this challenge.

Enough unpleasant talk about money! As we worship together Sunday after Sunday, our liturgy reassures us that our lives and fates are in the hands of God, a “reassurance” expressed through the love of God in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. Through the preaching of this message, we are summoned to live and act in communion with God and to be concerned for God’s work in the world which is centered in the church.

I will leave you with the timely lesson which Father Stray learned from the wise insight of his young niece: “Gee, Uncle Arthur, if you’d given more, you’d -a got more!” **Amen**