



**SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE**  
**in the City of New York**  
*The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector*  
**[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)**

**Sunday, November 17, 2019**  
*The Twenty-Third Sunday After Pentecost*

*Choral Evensong*  
*at 4:00 p.m.*

+

A Sermon by  
The Reverend Alison J. Turner,  
*Director of Children and Family Ministry*  
on  
1 Chronicles 14:29  
+

### **All things come from thee O Lord and of Thine own do we give Thee**

Have ever been on a tour of our beautiful church? It is filled with symbolism and mystery reflecting the prayers and memories and beliefs or theology of those who have gone before us.

On occasion as we are preparing for a service in the Vesting room, one of my colleagues will spot a new image or inscription, carved or molded into the very fabric of the building. Sometimes these images are barely visible as they are camouflaged within a door or whitewashed ceiling. Ask Father Moretz about his saintly sightings!

One such recent discovery was a scattering of words alongside the flowers on the ceiling, which we soon deciphered are virtues, not simply the human qualities of Aristotle and other great philosophers, but those drawn from the Bible: chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, patience, kindness and humility.

It is fascinating that this group of virtues are found in at least three places in our church. They are found, not only in the Vesting room ceiling, they are depicted in the windows of the Rector's Study and then again in the icon like detail within the font cover in the Chantry Chapel. Each time they are depicted in close proximity to their opposing pairs, sometimes called vices. Each pair expressing a spectrum of desirable and undesirable, or positive and negative qualities in the Christian life, and through their very commission mirror the beliefs of the founders of this place. A concept which Richard Kieckhefer, a prolific writer on church architecture reflects on as *Theology in Stone*.<sup>1</sup>

Today the language of virtues or even vices does not appear directly or even frequently in our conversation about the Christian life. There is a tendency to focus on more familiar and positive qualities, such as fruits of the spirit or beatitudes, as sources of gift and blessing, as we heard explored in sermons by Sister Promise and The Rector in recent weeks. This was too exemplified by the Chancellor of the Order of Saint John at yesterday's Service of Investiture and Rededication in Charleston, where he spoke of the arms of the Maltese cross symbolizing virtues of prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude, and its eight points standing for the beatitudes which spring from these virtues.

In turning to today's second lesson, we have just heard the Parable of the Unjust Steward sometimes known as the Parable of the Penitent Steward, and often times the Parable of the Shrewd Manager. Here we are confronted with another trait, which in some biblical versions is known as shrewdness, a term that does not

find itself in these aforementioned lists of vices and virtues. I wonder is shrewdness a term of good or ill? (In Middle English I discovered this word came from the word shrew, now that certainly doesn't sound like a complement!).

While we may see shrewdness as an essential or even desirable quality or virtue in a business world, or when dealing with domestic accounts is this something we should be seeking when choosing God or Mammon? Should our lives be motivated by gain or generosity? Forgiveness or reproach? Being rich or poor? While for some shrewdness may mean thoughtful, diligent, carefulness, wisdom, canniness, creativity with funds, here in this parable, shrewdness is associated with dishonesty and broken trust. This parable presents us with a challenge, if we simply perceive this to be an example of Jesus condoning the shrewd manager.

Some scholars reflect on the interaction between the rich man and his manager, as one that echoes the essence of Parable of the Prodigal Son, found in the previous chapter in Luke's Gospel. For both manager and Son have both spoiled or squandered all that they had been entrusted. However, the response each receives is not one of reproach rather the good news of forgiveness and the overwhelming love of God, beyond all human or worldly comprehension.

Others suggest that this parable is at odds with Luke's *bias to the poor*, in favor of desiring riches and gaining or claiming wealth. The setting certainly echoes other accounts of Jesus' concern with worldliness. For it is one of over forty accounts set in the market place and with references to about our worldly goods, with imagery of lost coins or mites, talents, and infamously taking a coin to show that we are to give to Caesar what is Caesars. All of which said in ear shot of the Pharisees with their propensity to dismiss and to judge his counter-cultural call to embrace God's kingdom, and not the worlds.

Other writers suggest that this parable is concerned with us taking stock and going deeper to illumine not only the Pharisees but our priorities in life including all that is mammon. It is urging us to reflect on our faithfulness and attitudes not only to money but the wealth of our resources, our gifts and even our time. Not the quantity of what we have but how choose to save, share it, use it or give it away. Does it rule us, or is it integrated into our own 'rule of life', or choices we make for God or mammon?

We all know people who has bear the virtue or gift of generosity. For some it directs a call to radical living and radical giving, witnessed in the lives the Franciscans who on taking life vows are sent out with this charge with: *Call nothing your own*.

We sometimes encounter Christians who fully embrace all that they have, little or great, as blessing, bearing witness that "All things come from Thee O Lord, and of Thine own do we give Thee", for whom giving and giving back is a way of life. "I am here on this world because of God, therefore all I have is his. Nothing is mine, all is his." For these people giving is not based on a token gesture, obligation or transaction but a commitment to growing in relationship with God, and our neighbor. It is both spontaneous and careful, generous and responsible and bearing the gift of humility.

In reflecting on charitable responses and drives to *Feed an Island* after the hurricane damage in Puerto Rico and surrounding area in 2017, Jose Andres commented on the work of Robert Egger, a leading advocate on food issues, "Too often, charity is about the redemption of the giver no the liberation of the receiver".<sup>2</sup>

This very phrase made me think:

Does our giving of time and talent take into account what is needed or is it a response motivated to simply to make us feel better, to tick a box and move on?

The lights are going up in time for Thanksgiving and here in NYC we are immersed in an inviting material world especially as the holiday seasons approach. We can all be easily drawn into the joyful sparkle and

attitudes about gain over giving and attitudes that may well challenge our commitment to mammon and God even without realizing. Random acts of giving kindness are ever more important but giving, grateful hearts and .com gifting is not enough.

As we first prepare for Advent, which parallels the launch of a new church year, may we take a moment to consider not how much but how and who we are giving or will give to, is it based on what I want to give and my need to feel good about giving, or a genuine response flowing out of my of gratitude to God and love for my neighbor?

In these coming weeks may we be faithful in reflecting on the virtues written in our walls and in our hearts of our founders, and consider what is written, as well as lived out from our own hearts.

In these coming weeks may our giving come from a place of sharing not greed, humility not pride, generosity not gain, for “All things come from thee O Lord and of Thine own do we give Thee.”<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>. Kieckhefer, R. (2004) *Theology in Stone: Church architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley*. Oxford University Press, New York.

<sup>2</sup>. Andres. J. with Wolffe. R. (2018) *We Fed an Island* HarperCollins Publishers, New York

<sup>3</sup>. 1 Chronicles 29:14