

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, November 19, 2023

The Twenty-Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

Festal Evensong

4 p.m.

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A Sermon by

The rev. Canon Carl Turner, *Rector*

on

1 Chronicles 29:1-14; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

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Annual Appeal 2024 Sermon for Evensong

In our Strategic Plan of 2019, we shared a vision:

To become more Christ-like in everything that we do, making a difference to midtown Manhattan by being a vibrant community of faith where all can feel at home. Our beautiful building and musical tradition help us to reach out as a beacon of hope.

Fr. Mead, my predecessor, spoke about that vision when he preached to us for our Bicentennial Patronal Feast. Speaking of this glorious building, its mission, its liturgy, its music, and its teaching, Fr. Mead reminded us that *“It remains our mission to invite and to draw people into that life-giving mystery.”*

If you attended the Annual Meeting, or have watched it on-line, you will have heard how, in spite of the pandemic, our mission is strong and collegial; the very last words of our vision statement are the theme for our services today: *“To do this, we need to ensure that our mission is strong, resolute, ordered, and appropriately resourced.”*

What do the scripture readings tell us about resourcing the church in its mission? Let us start with the New Testament reading. The New Testament Church had no official buildings; it was a Church ‘on the move’ and very much focused in peoples’ homes. In fact, it was over 300 years before the church became ‘established’ and basilicas appeared. Does this mean they had no need for financial support? On the contrary; in the Acts of the Apostles, we read that the early followers of Jesus shared their resources in common in order to help those less fortunate – particularly the widows and the orphans and the poor and the hungry.¹ But they also sent funds to other churches in need. If you like, it was the origins of the parish assessment that we give to the Diocese. Paul regularly shared the needs of particular Churches and people many hundreds of miles away sent resources to help. The ministry of the apostles and the early deacons of the Church was also supported financially by Church members who gave generously according to their means. Notice what Paul says to the Corinthian Church, *“You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity.”* It seems counter-intuitive, but from the earliest days of the Church, giving your money away was seen as an enriching, even liberating experience, rooted in thankfulness to God for his generosity. Resourcing the mission and ministry of the Church is, therefore, biblical.

In the Old Testament Lesson, we heard of King David making resources available so that his son, Solomon would be able to build the first Temple. In what is probably the most successful Annual Appeal ever, King David asks the leaders of the ancestral houses to give generously and willingly. He called it a “free-will” offering. Not a tax or a demand, but a gift to God. And what a gift it was! The list of tens of thousands of talents translates into billions of dollars by today’s standards. David ensured that not only the Temple would be built, but that there would be enough endowment in the treasury for its upkeep and for the provision of

the ministers. Did he pat himself on the back at being such a successful fund raiser? Listen to how he ended his prayer: *“But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill offering? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.”*

You see, giving in biblical times was done with the understanding that all good things came from God; if you will, it already belonged to him, and that is why the biblical tithe is so important – giving back to God the first ten percent. That, my friends, is why I need you to respond to our own Annual Appeal. To make, as it were, your own free-will offering. St. Paul says to you and to me, *“Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”* Giving to our Annual Appeal is exactly in the same spirit of those examples we heard in scripture today; recognizing like King David that **“All things come from thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee.”**

1. See Acts 2:43-47