

From our Gospel this morning: Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also" (Luke 12.34)

This sermon is a follow-on from last Sunday's theme, 'Possessions and the Kingdom'. Giving is one of God's favourite subjects. It is also an exciting subject. There are riches in this quest that are much greater than money. Giving takes us to the heart of being a Christian. It also brings us up against one of the most powerful idols we face. This is what makes giving for many people such a difficult issue. It can put us in the midst of a big conflict. All over the world there is strong pressure around wealth and possessions. Whether we are rich or poor, the pressure is there. So, where does our true treasure lie?

A moment of tremendous awakening for the searching Christian is when for the first time in your life you discover the joy of realising that your own efforts and striving don't justify your place in the Kingdom of Heaven. We need not be young or green in the Christian journey to have missed this glorious truth – some people have been churchgoers for decades and have not discovered this freedom. It is summed up in some words from the Letter to the Ephesians: *By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.* (Eph 2.8)

This text also goes to the very heart of the parables of the Workers in the Vineyard and the Prodigal Son (or Loving Father) in the Gospels. Remember how the last workers got paid the same as those who had laboured through the burden and heat of a whole day? Remember the fatted calf for the wayward son and the other 'faithful' brother's indignation? What's going on? Well, we're in Ephesians 2.8 country; that's what. (Repeat Eph 2.8) Grace means 'free gift'. It is God's unconditional love. Those well-known parables highlight how our human works have very little to do with God's grace, but a FAITHFUL RESPONSE means everything; it opens the door to the spontaneous overflow of divine blessing. Trade Unions would go berserk with this! The workers' case would go to arbitration. In the case of the prodigal, it all seems so unfair to the loyal brother. But heaven's rules are very different.

What mattered in both cases; indeed, all that mattered, was a turning around – an abandonment to the master's will. The workers go into the vineyard – all get the same pay although they work different hours. No matter. They all went when they were called and Grace is given. The prodigal prepares a speech to get back in favour with dad. No need. All he had to do was turn around and Grace is given. The one who stayed home and did the 'right thing' received the same gift despite his holier-than-thou protestations. This could easily be the faithful lifetime churchgoer who gets a bit disconcerted when some infamous rat bag gets saved – it doesn't seem fair in one sense. But don't forget the criminal next to Jesus on the cross: talk about a deathbed, 11.9th hour repentance! All that matters friend is

your response to the call of Divine Love. And Grace is given; in the criminal's case: Paradise! Don't delay, however: the clock will strike midnight.

God's grace doesn't depend on logic. That is because logic is not the final arbiter in life, contrary to the opinion of many. A lot of important and meaningful things are done in life that seem illogical. A proud father spends his whole wage on his daughter's graduation ball gown when it would have been more logical to pay the bills. You may remember the Oscar winning movie *As good as it gets*: A woman falls in love with an obsessive-compulsive, cranky, self-centred man, much older than herself, because she discovers a glimmer, just a glimmer, of grace and beauty in him. Far more logical to have contacted an agency to procure the younger type with a great medical history and good looks, the 'perfect match' no less. When you come to think about it, calculation and logic don't play much of a part in most of the important things in life: birth, death, love, hate, fear, depression, goodness, joy...The truth is that when Grace is around, logic is reduced to a very minor role – calculated expectation too. The only thing that matters is our *response*. So, what does that response look like?

Everything that you and I have in life is a gift from God – is a sign of God's overflowing grace. Sure, we may work hard. Many of us have grown up with a full-on Anglo Saxon Protestant Work Ethic life script, and the stress that can come with it! Or the Frank Sinatra heresy: *I did it my way*. But even our work is a gift from God. As the beautiful hymn goes, *All good things around us are sent from heaven above...then thank the Lord, thank the Lord, for all his love*. How will we respond to the grace and mercy of God? I once gave a poster to a girl on her 18th birthday. It read, *God's gift to you is life – What you do with it is your gift to God*.

Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also" All our possessions, including money, are given us to take good care of for God. We cannot take them with us when we go. God wants us to be wise stewards of all these things, to deal with them and share them carefully and responsibly. To give generously of yourself and your possessions honours God's gift to you of life and God's greatest gift, Jesus Christ. It is a witness to your acknowledgement of God's grace and first place. Jesus also said, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Mt 6.33) So, it makes a statement. It is an outward sign of your response to God's inner grace in your life. Yes, it is a sacramental thing. As the bread and wine of Eucharist is offered and transformed into Christ's real presence to nourish us, so our giving is transformed into a living ministry of love here and beyond.

Thanks be to God for this inexpressible gift. Amen.