

How can I speak to you about stewardship without seeming judgmental, critical, condemning or hypocritical? In these days, how can I speak about how much we should give to God's work without being told that it's none of my damn business, or that by stating figures I'm breaking some law or other?

Well, perhaps that is part of the reason why so many of our churches are drifting further and further away from a sound financial footing towards bankruptcy or at least an uncertain future.

Yet it need not be like that: in the reading from Ephesians we hear that God is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine. Isn't that a wonderful thing. A God who can do more than we dream! But wait, the end of the verse says...according to his power that is at work within us...so maybe that includes us after all! What can we give, while we remember that his power is at work within us. Well, the main things that I see are our time, our talents and our money.

None of these things belong to us: they have been given to us by God for us to look after. In the Old Testament, the command of tithing is very clear: one tenth of all we have, we give to God's work. Now, this doesn't seem to be a very fashionable thing to say in these days. We keep on being told that times are hard and that this is an unrealistic thing for us even to ask. All I know is that for our church to continue on an even footing, we need in the region of \$75,000 income each year, and that we are not receiving this. I shall not begin to do any fancy calculations, but certainly a church with such a budget should be able to funded by less than forty people giving a tenth of a salary. However, my main focus today will not be on money,

though of course that is a most important part of the continued mission of our church here in Mahora. Instead, I want to look at time. Time is one thing where none of us are rich or poor: we all have the same amount of it. Every day, each one of us issued with 24 hours to do with as he or she pleases. Some of us will use some of that time and convert it into money. This is paid employment. Some of us will spend time in what is called unproductive labour. We call this play. Other time is spent in other pursuits, some useful, some useless. One of the saddest things we come across is people who say "I had an hour to kill" and we can be sure that by the end of the hour, it really is dead! If you don't leave with any other thought today, I hope you will remember that When you kill time, you murder success.

Commitment is something that can easily frighten people away, and I hope that I won't do that to you here today. As with every talk about commitment, the people who really need to hear it aren't here. There's no absenteeism here today - all the absentees have stayed at home. I see that people can be committed to the church not just by giving money but by giving of their time to God's work. A good start is by being regular in your attendance at Sunday worship. What a pity that our service is on a Sunday morning, because that knocks out part of the weekend, and by the time the service is over, there isn't really time to do much else, we hear. The service takes most of Sunday morning, by the time we have got ready, arrived, joined in worship of the Creator of the Universe, drunk morning tea and gone home. This is God's plan: worship and the meeting of God's people.

That in itself would be something good, but please listen: I am not saying that you must attend church every Sunday. If you have a good reason, not an excuse, then by all

means stay away. However, as one of God's family, I urge you to join in the celebration here with the rest of your family whenever you can. Sorry, you can't be a member of a family by yourself. I don't need to go to church because I can worship God just as well in a garden, in the bush, while I'm fishing, while I'm in the pub. Sorry, it doesn't work like that. I think Jan has covered this fairly thoroughly quite recently, and I don't want to go over the same ground again.

There are lots of other things that we can do which will make God's work here in Mahora more successful. What can you do? Can you help with one of the many groups that meet in and around the church? Is your ability and talent to be found in music, or in teaching the young, or in teaching the not quite so young? Maybe you can organise a group to do something I haven't even dreamed about yet. There are lots of groups of people meeting round here and lots of other needs that we haven't even started to meet yet. What support do we offer for those who are preparing for marriage, for example. Where, in the body of believers here, can people turn if they have some particular spiritual need?

The vicar? Maybe, but Jan can't do everything. Like the rest of us, vicars only have 24 hours in the day and they need to eat and sleep too. Don't think that it's an easy life, working just one day a week. I can't believe what clergy actually do sometimes, with visits to all sorts of people, with preparations for weddings, baptisms, funerals, other services, meeting and committees, preparation of worship, dealing with people like you, people like me.

The readers or the wardens? We're people with plenty of things to do around the place too, and it all takes time. And apart from the Vicar and the Secretary, nobody here

gets paid, yet we struggle along, with the goodwill of many people doing many different things. Musicians, readers, those who pray, those who organise the flowers, the cleaning...whoa! I'm not going to try to name every job that's done around here because I might offend somebody if I miss them out. Yet that's not the point!

Years ago, I worked for a large company in England at the time that their administration manager was retiring! Ha! said one of my colleagues. Will anyone notice? I'm sure he meant it as an insult, yet it came across to me as a glowing compliment. Quietly, behind the scenes, expecting no praise, he got on with the job, making sure that what was supposed to happen did happen. If something needed to be done, either he did it or arranged for some others to do it.

That's how it should be here, with jobs done by people who spot that they are needed. It's much easier to do something than to complain that it's not been done. That is commitment. Not only are you doing God's work, you are helping the other people here and you are being a part of the whole community of faith here.

But you can only do such a little thing, you say. How can that be worth anything? Well, lots of people have wondered about it, but our Gospel reading today tells of how one young boy with five loaves and two fish gave them to Jesus, who used them to feed a great crowd containing five thousand men as well as women and children. To be sure, this was a miracle, but it was built on the gift of a small boy. In the same way, the widow who gave a tiny coin was reckoned to have given far more than the rich men who put in hundred dollar notes.

In the church of St. Giles in Birmingham, there is a stained glass window depicting this story, and if I have mentioned

it before I make no apology. We see the people looking on as she puts her coin in the offertory, but you can see in the picture that she is not, as I had previously thought, an old woman, but a young woman with two young children with her. That breathed a whole new meaning into the story for me.

It comes down to the same: we cannot hope to continue running a church without a fair old number of committed people. We need commitment in terms of both time and money. It's easy to give money - just write a cheque or hand over a picture of the queen and it's done. Time is harder. I've never seen a real cheque for a hundred hours. You actually have to be there and do it!

These then, are the requirements for a successful church: people who are prepared to give their money and their time so that God's work can be done by all of His people. No one of us can do it alone, but together we are God's family in this place, united in our vision of what God can do through us.

He is able to do more than we can ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us. To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.