

Sermon: 21st October 2018

How many of you manage property? You might think that is a strange question to begin today's sermon but, the events of Luke chapter 16, focuses on a man who manages property. He does not own the property himself, but he manages it on behalf of someone else. So back to the question. How many of us manage property? The answer is, all of us. We are all called to be good stewards of the very property we are sitting in this morning.

In our story, the manager is asked to give a complete account of his handling of the property. So this is a good story for stewardship season. When we think about stewardship we tend to focus on the 'traditional' aspects of, financial giving, the time and talents we offer in serving God and the church, and care of creation. All of these are hugely important, but today I want change our focus, to the idea of 'community stewardship'. That phrase was coined by our Session Clerk, George Drummond. You might be wondering what it means.

As a congregation, one of the things that is our responsibility is our building. Not just maintaining it, for our use; but developing it, for the wider community. It is not just about raising money, so we have a nice building to meet in. Good stewardship of our building is far wider than that. Stewardship is not fundraising. Stewardship is not about ourselves. Stewardship is about being resourceful.

The only comment we have about the manager of this property is that he was dishonest. That does not seem a good start. The other thing we know is, this man is fearful of losing his job and all that would go with it. He would literally have to get his hands dirty or end up begging in the streets. Universal credit comes to mind, but we are not going down that route, today.

What he needed to do, and do quickly, was to be resourceful. If he could not get all the money back owed to the owner, he could get some of it back, and in doing so was praised by the owner of the property. This is a difficult passage to understand. The dishonesty is not punished, but is picked up later in the story, where the idea of dishonesty becomes a lack of faithfulness in handling worldly wealth, which is another key aspect of stewardship. But remember, this is just a story, enabling Jesus to make a point. Well actually, lots of points. It is a complex story, where lots of different ideas seem to be coming together.

There was a phrase that caught my eye, *'the people of this world are much more shrewd in handling their affairs than the people who belong to the light.'* (v. 8) How do we become shrewd in our stewardship, including that of our building? One of the key aspects of stewardship is this, we are asked to 'give away'. Not to hold tightly, but to offer what we have to others. Our money, our time, our talents, and our building. That is

based on the understanding that stewardship is about what God has given to us, so part of our giving ; is offering our building to the community.

After all, community is what we are about. The wider community that is God's creation and our local community. One of the clarion calls of Jesus is to serve. As the disciples met in the upper room to share the Passover, what did Jesus do? He washed their feet. In an act of service, the Rabbi washed his disciples feet. That act broke every convention in the book! He served them, offering bread and wine. We are called to serve and respond to the needs of those around us. And one of our great assets, is our building, which actually lies empty most of the day.

How do we respond to this. Jesus said, *'make friends for yourselves with worldly wealth, so that when it gives out, you will be welcomed in the eternal home'*. That says to me, we don't shut ourselves away, but we meet God where God is, out in the world and already working in our community, and we build partnerships. We do not take God into our community, he is already there. Let's say to our community, the things you are concerned about, we are also concerned about. Let's work together. We might not have much money or skills, but we have a building to offer. Motivation might be a bit different, but that does not matter, the needs of people are the same. Together,

we can respond to people's pain and we can help build community.

This passage does not get any easier. Jesus offers a challenge, if you can't handle the things of this world, how can you be trusted with that which is eternal. I heard recently that Kirkcaldy has a huge drug issue, across all age groups, as seen in those who pass through our court system. It is a world most of us have no idea about, but it is a huge need in our local community. To meet such needs we need partnership working, and as part of the local community we need to be asking ourselves, what can we offer. You might be saying to yourself, I have no skills in that area. But... and there is always a 'but'.

There is a program entitled, Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). We are sitting in one of our biggest assets. An asset that does not belong to us. We might be responsible for its upkeep, but it is part of our Christian stewardship. How do we become faithful to God in that which does not belong to us?

Christian stewardship goes to the heart of who we are; as a people of God in this place. It is a challenge to our loyalty. About what we see as important. About what we understand as the priorities of the Kingdom of God. We are not much different from the manger, in what God is asking of us. To be resourceful as we follow Jesus, and to be faithful, in what God has given us. Amen.