

## *Stewardship of our Treasures*

*Deuteronomy 26:1-11; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7; Mark 12:41-44*

The Catechism asks how we are to live the life of the baptized, and answers simply: “By prayer, by regular worship and by using our time, talents and money to serve Christ in the world.” Stewardship isn’t an optional extra; it’s a fundamental element of how we live out our baptism.

There’s a story told about the ancient Gauls – a warlike people living in modern-day France and Belgium. Eventually, Christian missionaries ventured into their territory, and many Gauls were converted. The story goes that when a warrior was immersed in the baptismal waters, he would hold one arm high above the surface. Perplexed, a missionary asked why. The reply was simple: when the next battle came, the warrior could raise his sword and declare, “This arm is not baptized!” – free to slaughter his enemy in the most unchristian manner.

It’s a striking image: a person trying to keep an aspect of their life untouched by the grace of baptism. But stewardship, like baptism, requires us to get wet. We have to ask ourselves: What part of my life am I trying to keep dry? And then, we must yield that part to the waters of baptism.

Stewardship encompasses everything we’ve received from God. Having previously reflected on our time and our talents, we now turn to our treasures – the material resources and money entrusted to us. For many of us, our finances can be that one limb held high above the water. Perhaps that is why Jesus spoke about money so frequently; in fact, he addressed it more than almost any other subject, save for the Kingdom of God.

In the Gospel story, Jesus sits watching people place their offerings into the temple treasury. Rich donors make grand displays with large sums. Then, an impoverished widow quietly drops in two small copper coins – the smallest currency of the day. Jesus turns to his disciples and says:

“This poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.”

This widow, among the most vulnerable in her society, gave everything. By any reasonable measure, she could have kept one coin for herself. But she gave both. Her giving wasn’t calculated. She didn’t pause to work out a neat ten percent for the collection plate – which is probably what the wealthy donors were doing. She gave recklessly. But why?

Jesus puts her gift into perspective: those two tiny coins were far more generous than all the extravagant wealth thrown into the chest. The true value of a gift isn’t determined by its cash figure, but by its cost to the giver and the commitment behind it. For the wealthy, their large gifts were a tiny fraction of their fortune – a drop in the bucket. For this woman, it was the whole bucket.

Jesus isn’t asking us to bankrupt ourselves. Rather, he holds up this widow as a portrait of total commitment. Her example challenges us because it reveals a life entirely focused on God – a life of absolute trust. She didn’t offer a small slice of her life; she offered her whole self.

The exact dollar amount is never the point; the love and commitment behind it are.

We see this same pattern in Deuteronomy. The Israelites were commanded to set aside the first fruits of their harvest as an offering to God. Why? Because of what God had done for them. Their giving was a direct response to grace. God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, sustained them through the

wilderness, and brought them into a land of promise. Out of deep gratitude, they brought the first and the best of what they had.

We, too, are called to respond to God's generosity by setting aside the first and the best of what we have received. True Christian giving springs from gratitude, not obligation. We give because our hearts are full, not because of a driving sense of "should" or "ought."

So a vital question emerges for each of us: Is my giving of time, talent, and money an authentic expression of thankfulness for God's goodness to me?

Writing to the church in Corinth, Paul shared an extraordinary example of this kind of generosity among the believers in Macedonia. Here is a paraphrase of what he wrote:

"Fierce troubles came down on those churches, pushing them to the very limit. But the trial exposed their true colours: they were incredibly happy, though desperately poor. The pressure triggered something totally unexpected – an outpouring of pure and generous gifts. They gave far more than they could afford, completely on their own initiative. What explains it? First, they gave themselves unreservedly to God and to us. Everything else simply flowed out of God's work in their lives."

The Macedonians didn't give out of abundance. If we transported them to contemporary New Zealand, many of them would be living on benefits and Income Support. Yet they gave out of their deep poverty because they had first given their hearts to God.

This raises a second practical question: How much should I give?

The Macedonians gave as much as they possibly could – the exact opposite of asking, "What is the absolute minimum I can get away with and still clear my conscience?"

Under Jewish law, the standard was the tithe – giving ten percent of one's harvest or income. While the tithe is a helpful, practical benchmark because it is simple to calculate, the New Testament doesn't impose a hard and fast law. Instead, we're invited into a framework of regular, proportional, and generous giving.

Proportional giving means that as our income rises or falls, our giving adjusts accordingly. But whatever method you choose, the core question remains: Does my giving reflect my commitment to God, and does it demonstrate my gratitude for who God is in my life?

At the offertory, we often say those familiar words: "All that is in the heavens and the earth is yours, and of your own we give you."

It's a reminder that everything belongs to God – our money, our time, our talents, and our very lives. Baptism made us God's people. Stewardship is simply how we live out that reality every day. As the saying goes: Stewardship is everything we do after we say "Yes" to Christ.

Because the giving of our treasure touches the very heart of our relationship with God, I leave you with Paul's profound reminder:

You know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
that though he was rich,  
yet for your sakes he became poor,  
so that by his poverty you might become rich.

Lord God,  
who has given us everything,  
grant us the grace to withhold nothing from you.  
Submerge every part of our lives  
– our time, our talents, and our treasures –  
in the waters of your love,  
that all we do may flow from a grateful heart.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Alister Hendery: 20. 9. 2026 – Taradale*