

**Discipleship, Fellowship, and Stewardship**  
*Stewardship Sunday*  
*Luke 16:19-31*

Wade Hinkle  
Episcopal Church of the Holy Cross  
Dunn Loring, VA  
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Good morning.

This morning, I want to talk about three things: discipleship, fellowship, and stewardship.

Here's why.

Today is Stewardship Sunday. It is the start of the time each year when each of us — the members of the Holy Cross church family — is asked to consider an important question: What will you contribute next year in terms of your *money, time, and talent*?

Now, today may seem a strange time to talk to you about money, given the tone of this morning's Gospel reading from Luke. And not just this morning.

When you read Luke in a concentrated dose, as we have been doing in this Lectionary year, Year C, it can seem like people with money are being made into piñatas.

Last week, in part of the same parable we heard today, we read that “you cannot serve God and wealth”<sup>1</sup> at the same time. Earlier in Luke, the Rich Fool drops dead after boasting about his wealth.<sup>2</sup> Later in Luke we are told “how hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>3</sup> And then this week we have the rich man who ignored the pauper Lazarus and is literally burning in hell.

It really does make you think that Luke is saying “money is the root of all kinds of evil,” although *that* passage is actually found in the first letter to Timothy.<sup>4</sup>

So how weird is it that I want us to think about money this morning? Shouldn't we be feeling sort of, uh, guilty about money? If you've got it, be ashamed of it?

Well, I want to talk about money for the same reason it comes up in First Timothy. Not about money for ourselves, *but for use by the church*. Which is exactly how the topic comes up in the

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 16<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 12:13-21.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 18<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 6:10.

epistle. First Timothy is really an essay on what resources the church needs from its members for its mission. And that's my subject too.

The real lesson of today's reading of Luke is not that money is bad. *Money is a "thing."*

What the Gospel is telling us is that God expects us — all of us — to use *all* the resources we have at our disposal to live according to his Word.

And that means loving God with all our heart, and loving our neighbors as ourselves.<sup>5</sup> Money is not the measure of a person. ***What you do with it is.*** What you do with *any of the gifts God has given you* is. Which is why, during stewardship season, we ask you to *pledge time and effort* to the church as well as money.

So, that's the point about money. God wants you to use all of his gifts, money..., time..., talent, to live according to his Word. And to share the Word. To spread the Good News. To feed the hungry..., clothe the naked..., visit the ill and the imprisoned.<sup>6</sup>

***In short, God expects us all to use his gifts to be disciples.***

Let me pause on this point for a moment, because you may not be used to thinking of yourself as a disciple.

But the New Testament makes clear that you are. In *Acts*, when Paul and Barnabus begin to evangelize their faith experience, scripture records the result: they "made many disciples."<sup>7</sup>

So with that thought, you can understand why I say that the most important thing that Holy Cross does for its members is to *prepare us for discipleship*.

Preparation for discipleship is what makes a church different from a country club..., a book club..., the YMCA..., or a neighborhood association.

All those other activities are nice to participate in. They offer opportunities for socializing, making new friends, maybe even some self-improvement or community service.

Holy Cross offers those things as well, but that is not its main purpose. We Christians, we Episcopalians, are ***called to mission***.<sup>8</sup> Called to *ministry*.

And Holy Cross helps us prepare for that mission. In my opinion, it is the most important thing that Holy Cross does.

There are a lot of ways Holy Cross helps us toward discipleship. Collective worship is the most obvious. And that is deeply important to me.

But so is education in all forms: children's classes, adult forums, and Bible study. Music, and study of the hymnal. Preparation for confirmation. Service guilds that link us to ancient prayer, such as Altar Guild and Flower Guild. Preparation for lay people to serve at the altar.

Okay, so an essential part of what Holy Cross does for you may sound sort of cut and dried. We have *programs* to help you get started on ministry. Sounds sort of bloodless. Like night school.

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 22:34-40.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 25:31-46.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 14:22.

<sup>8</sup> Romans 8:29.

So here is where the second idea comes in. To prepare you for discipleship, Holy Cross teaches you about *fellowship*.

One thing that makes being a Christian so hard is the second part of the Great Commandment. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” I don’t know about you, but I fail at this daily. Bet you do too. Don’t hold your hands up, but how many people swore at someone in traffic this week? Youth group: how many thought their parents are jerks?

Learning how to live with, and love, each other is an essential component of Christianity. And, I humbly suggest, it may be the one thing as a Christian you cannot learn to do on your own. As we read in First Corinthians, when we assemble as a congregation, “each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.”<sup>9</sup>

The neat thing is Holy Cross is here to help you. This is a safe place, a *supportive* place, to practice fellowship. Plus, we are all only human. We get tired, sometimes we snap at each other. When that happens, you are within a Christian community. We will forgive you.

At least for me, no place has been better in the last 20 years for learning about discipleship and fellowship than Holy Cross.

So, now to Stewardship.

Our church, our parish, our mutual Christian family, needs to be *prepared by us* to do all the things I just described. That is what stewardship means.

And to be prepared, we need two things. First, and very important for next year, we need for you to *volunteer your time and talent* to help the rest of us prepare. Quite frankly, right at the moment, Holy Cross has a volunteer deficit. There are too few parishioners willing to plan and lead activities. Don’t get me wrong. Participation is itself important. But things don’t self-organize. Your church needs your help in making activities happen.

Second, and very important, *your church needs your money*. I’m not going to be apologetic about this. To serve its function of preparing us all for discipleship, and for allowing us to practice fellowship, Holy Cross has to be in a state of good repair.

As those of you who were members of the parish a few years ago know, back then, we were not in good repair.

This year, the Vestry, the clergy and staff, the Finance Committee, and the Stewardship Committee had a frank discussion about mission and finances. We developed a multi-year computer forecast of expenses and revenues.

We cut proposed spending to the bone. Staff will get no cost of living increase next year. We will only slowly restore the offering to the diocese. But, at the same time, we recognize that the building is getting older, and we need to set aside money for repairs.

In short, there is a multi-year vision for the future. *We can be out of deficit by 2019*, and supporting more and more programs.

If Holy Cross grows by about 5 percent in membership over the next five years, and each family or member increases its pledge each year by 5 percent, we will meet this goal,

Holy Cross needs to be restored to a state of good repair in order to be our launching point for discipleship. It must be in good repair in terms of the physical facility, a talented staff, debt, and a committed set of parishioners called to mission and supported by all of us who are the Holy Cross family.

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:26.

For the next weeks of the Stewardship campaign, here is a thought experiment I want to leave you with. Imagine a son or daughter, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew, just told you something they were urgently called to do as Christians. And they asked for your support.

Today, that is exactly what your church, Holy Cross is asking for. We need your money, time, and talent.

Amen.