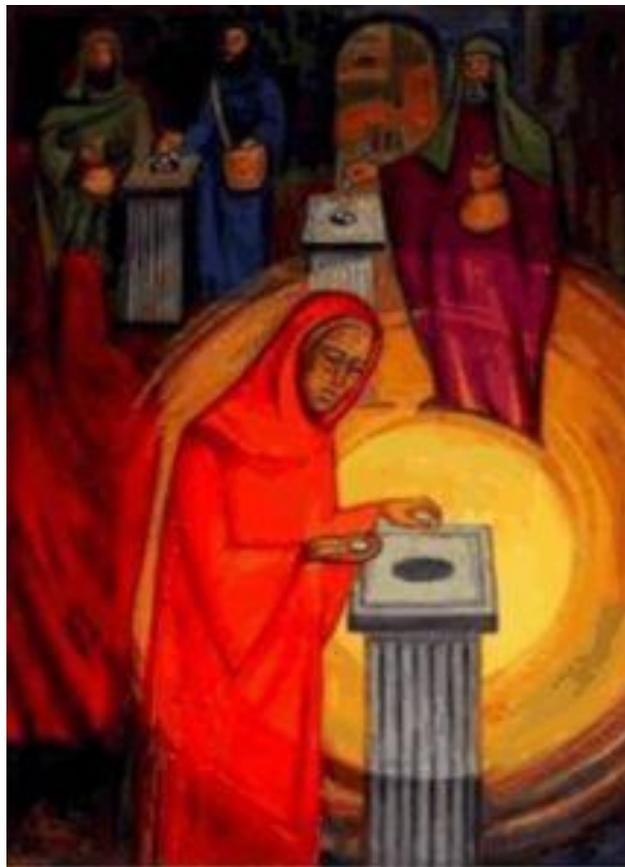


Reflections & Prayers
for the Last Sunday after Trinity
25th October 2020



*“Keep your life free from love of money,
and be content with what you have, for he has said,
“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*

(Hebrews 13:5)

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Introduction

Over the last few weeks, we have been thinking about stewardship. This has followed on from our celebration of Creationtide - the two are clearly linked. As Christians, we are called to praise God, our great Creator, and give thanks for the wonders of the world of which we are a part. We are called to be good stewards of all creation, to cherish and preserve all manner of life and resources for future generations – in short, to make sure that there is something equally wonderful and abundant to hand on to the next generation.

Our focus on financial stewardship has a similar aim, to support Christ's church here on earth – to cherish and nurture it so that it can continue to be a vehicle for handing on the Good News to the next generation and beyond. The Church is much more than the building, we know that, but the building and those employed within it play a vital part in sustaining our Christian life and enabling us to reach out in mission and ministry to those within our parish. Without a physical church it would be much harder to gather together in worship and praise of our heavenly Father and our spiritual lives would therefore be greatly diminished and our ability to reach others in need would be much harder.

Two weeks ago, Tom Venner broke down the facts and figures for us and challenged us to think about whether we could dig a little deeper to support St John's financially. Last week, Canon Tim Bull talked about being excited by God – if we are excited let's share that excitement and invest in it, just as we would with anything else in life that moved and inspired us. This Sunday, Lauryn is going to reflect on the story of the widow's mites, the ultimate example of sacrificial giving. Her gift is the greatest of all because she has so little to offer. Like the widow, we too must trust that God will provide for us. He has showered gifts upon us in abundance: creation, life itself, the life of his only Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. The least that we can do is say "thank you" and give back to God some of the great riches that he has endowed us with.

Readings for this Sunday

Below, are this week's readings from the lectionary, which we shall use at our 5 p.m. service of the Eucharist - you may like to look them up in your Bibles at home. For Sunday morning's service - the final of our sermon series focusing on stewardship - we shall read the short story of the widow's mites from Luke's Gospel.

Lev. 19: 1-2, 15-18

Psalm 1

1 Thessalonians 2: 1-8

Matthew 22: 34-end

The Widow's Mites

Jesus looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, "Truly I tell you; 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."

(Luke 21: 1-4)



Reflection

The Widow's Mite... from Lauryn Awbrey

Pennies. My son William's first complete sentence was, "I got money." And in his chubby little fist was a penny.

A penny these days is an odd thing.

Do you know the phrase “Find a penny, pick it up, all the day you’ll have good luck”? Most people, even children, won’t bother to pick up a penny these days. But do you also know the saying, “Mind the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves”?

The treasury considered, last year, getting rid of pennies, arguing that they were inefficient and expensive. But under some pressure from small businesses and charities, they backed down.

The widow’s mite that we heard of in today’s gospel reading, was the very smallest bronze copper coin in the Roman empire. Two mites made one quadrans, which was in value nearly a halfpenny. It is true that half a penny was worth more 2000 years ago ... maybe a bit more like two-pound coins. But even so, not a great amount.

The point is often made that the widow gave what she could. In fact, she gave more than she could, because she could have just given ONE mite. There was no boasting or posturing in her giving, no ceremony or pomp – just a quiet gift of some value, perhaps in fact, rather more than an impoverished widow at the time should be giving away.

We have been talking for the past few weeks in our worship services about stewardship and about giving. We have been quite specific and unapologetic about the fact that we are talking about giving **money**. The church, our church of St John’s in Harpenden, needs money – to pay for heat, light, flowers, music, repairs – boring stuff but essential stuff, just like in our own homes. Particularly true of my home... where the boiler needs servicing and the cracked ceiling needs painting.

So the church needs money, and we have had to ask ourselves, how much will I give? How much **can** I give, and how much will I give? It’s partly about practicalities – what does the church need and how much can I afford?

But our giving to God is a bit more complicated than that... complicated isn’t the right word... our giving is more fundamental, more basic than just what’s affordable. For me, the foundation of living, of Christian living, is God’s abundant love. We love because God first loved us. We give not just because we can, but because we are responding to God’s abundance of love and grace. //We are making an almost counter cultural and bold statement: **I believe in the life abundant.** I believe in God’s gracious plenty, not just for me but for the whole community and indeed for the whole world.

Another story of my sons and pennies... my mother had a silver tea service. She had neglected it and it was black with tarnish. She asked my 3 little boys to polish the tea service, promising them, by way of payment, her very large jar of pennies. Well, these 3 little boys rubbed and polished and the silver shone. Granma duly turned over the penny jar. The boys had a great time counting out the piles of pennies, then taking the pennies to the bank in a scene a bit like the children in Mary Poppins, while the banker weighed and

re-counted the coins and confirmed the final amount. Granma was as surprised as the boys were when the jar turned out to hold well over \$100!! The boys had worked hard, and Granma had promised, and she kept her promise and gave them the money. It was a surprise ending that none of us have forgotten!

Well, we don't give because we expect a return from God, a reward from God Except that again, it's a bit more complicated than that! There is a return – though not in terms of God's love! God loves us regardless! But a visible return of our giving is that we have a church. We have a place: a building where baptisms, weddings and funerals are held. Where in the presence of God and God's people, life events are marked. Where school children visit and community groups meet. Where concerts are held, where quiet prayer is offered. A place where all of life's momentous occasions are celebrated, where people gather to pray and to worship and to share in the passages of life, sometimes in loud and joyful ways and sometimes in more sombre and more subdued ways. We have a place in which life events happen and from which people go out ... to serve their neighbours, to visit the sick, to tend the dying, to counsel those in need, to share God's love and to show the face of Christ in a myriad of small, daily encounters.

Although our gatherings are truncated now, in these Covid days, people are still meeting to pray and worship... and we do believe that eventually we will gather together more freely, celebrating with singing and making a joyful noise ... and then we will thank God that we have this church to come to, that our church home is here to welcome us in.

Over the past four weeks, we have asked members of the congregation to think about what each of us can give, what financial offering we can make toward the life of St John's. This week we find ourselves blessed to have received a great amount of promises and pledges! If you haven't made your offering yet, don't worry, you can do so any time. But for what has already been offered, we want to say thank you. And we want to offer these gifts to God and ask for his blessing.

*Heavenly Father,
you have given us riches beyond measure.
You have called us to be your witnesses in the world.
We pray that our lives may bear witness
to your love shown in Jesus Christ,
and that our witness
may reflect your light in the communities
in which we live and work.
We ask, Lord, that you will bless these offerings
and help us to use them wisely
in your service
and for your glory.
Amen.*

Prayers

(With grateful thanks to Bryan Coventry for writing our intercessions this week)

Father, like the widow who offered all she had, may we also give generously knowing that you will always provide for our needs.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Merciful God, we continue to live in uncertain times where the normality of the life we knew just a few months ago has been replaced by fear and uncertainty. Comfort those struggling with depression, loneliness and despair and give them courage, hope and belief in a more certain future.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all those working in the NHS and in other health care settings mindful that many will be risking their lives to care for the sick.

And may we, together with friends and family, contribute to the national effort by heeding the recommended precautions and behaving responsibly.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for international, national and local leaders that they may be encouraged to coordinate their response to the pandemic and we ask that when an effective vaccine is finally discovered it is distributed promptly and fairly around the world.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for the staff and pupils of the school in France and for the family and friends of Samuel Paty the teacher brutally murdered last weekend.

We ask that those committed to violence instead pursue a policy of peaceful dialogue.

And to conclude our prayers on this Bible Sunday, a prayer written by a Chinese woman, illiterate into middle age but who, after learning to read, read the bible and became a Christian:

“Father, make us to be Bibles, so that those who cannot read this book may read it in us.”

AMEN

The Collect for the week

Blessed Lord,
who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning:

help us so to hear them, to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them that,
through patience, and the comfort of your holy word,
we may embrace and for ever hold fast the hope of everlasting life,
which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come - your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever.

Amen

Parish Prayers for the Week Ahead

In the Anglican cycle of prayer:

| | |
|-----------|--|
| Sunday | The Church in Wales |
| Monday | Remo (Nigeria); Cyprus and the Gulf (Jerusalem & Middle East); Kumasi (West Africa) |
| Tuesday | Renk (South Sudan); Daejeon (Korea); Kumi (Uganda) |
| Wednesday | Rhode Island (The Episcopal Church); Dallas (The Episcopal Church) |
| Thursday | Rift Valley (Tanzania); Damaturu (Nigeria); Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania) |
| Friday | Rio de Janeiro (Brazil); Davao (Philippines) |
| Saturday | Rio Grande (The Episcopal Church); Delaware (The Episcopal Church); Kurunegala (Ceylon) |

In our Diocesan cycle of prayer:

| | |
|-----------|--|
| Sunday | Parish of Wymington (Deanery of Sharnbrook) |
| Monday | Parish of Yelden (Deanery of Sharnbrook) |
| Tuesday | Parish of Aldenham (Deanery of St Albans) |
| Wednesday | Parish of Bricket Wood (Deanery of St Albans) |
| Thursday | Parish of Colney Heath, St Mark (Deanery of St Albans) |
| Friday | Parish of Frogmore, Holy Trinity (Deanery of St Albans) |
| Saturday | Parish of London Colney, St Peter (Deanery of St Albans) |

For the homes and families in:

| | |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|
| Sunday | Walkers Court, Walkers Road |
| Monday | The Warren, Welbeck Rise |
| Tuesday | Wensley Close, West Common |
| Wednesday | West Common Close, West Common Grove |
| Thursday | West Common Way, Westminster Court |
| Friday | Wheatfield Avenue, Wheatfield Road |
| Saturday | Wheathampstead Road, Willow Court |

The Sick:

Berkeley, Emily, Amy Smart, Claire, Jo, Sue, Christine Strohm, Hermione, Karen, Sue Holt, Enid Giles, Jo Young, Shambu Mitra and all whose names are entered on our St Luke's Cell Prayer List.

For the recently deceased:

Michael Squires

On their year's mind:

Brian Tweed, Clifford Stevens, David Phillips, Maurice Buttler, Roy Carrington, Pamela Hudson, Christine Russell, Irene Smith, Neville Hanson, Marjorie Allen, James Pavitt, John Munt, Joyce Summers.

[A reminder... of this phone service:](#)

Daily Hope – dial 0800 804 8044 for prayer, reflection, music and worship services from the Church of England. A weekly service is available from 9 am every Sunday.

All Souls Our annual service of remembrance for our departed ones will be held in church at 11.00am next Sunday 1 November. It will be a simple service of music, prayer and readings and an opportunity to light a candle in memory of a loved one. If you have a loved one whose name you would like to be read out at the service, please tell Julie in the office (01582 712776) or one of the ministry team.