

Sermon for Christ & Grace Church Petersburg, VA
Proper 21, Year A, October 1, 2017
The Rev. Bill Queen
“Stewards on Stewardship”
Galatians 6:7, 9-10

today kicks off our pledge month; you should already have received a letter from the Every Member Canvass Committee, with a pledge card in it; I pray that all of you will be thinking and praying seriously about what your pledge amount will be for the coming year; and I want to point out that over the next month, at the very same time as your pledges are coming in (request back by Nov. 1), the Search Committee will be interviewing candidates for your new Rector; those candidates will be asking questions about the financial strength of the parish and will want to know what kind of finances the parish will have at its disposal next year, the first year of their ministry with you; so your giving will have a direct and important influence on candidates’ desires to accept a call to serve here with you; please give that consideration as you decide about your pledge

I hope that all of you will also be thinking and praying about the other kinds of giving you can do along with your monetary giving; every one of us has God-given gifts of energy and creativity and know-how; there are innumerable ways to share our gifts with the church, through the church, and outside of the church; it takes all these things together with our monetary gifts to make up a complete life of Christian stewardship

I hope that all of you will also be thinking and praying about why you give of your time, of your talents, and of your treasure to the church; the letter from the Every Member Canvass Committee reminds us that “Growing Our Family” is one of the top priorities of Christ and Grace at this point in our parish’s long history, as we start our second 175 years; recall the Bible verse that was quoted in the letter, is in this month’s newsletter, and is in our bulletin announcement paragraph about the canvass today, from Galatians 6:9-10: “Let us not grow weary in doing what is right ... whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith;” another verse (7) reminds us that “you reap what you sow;” the idea of this being a close family parish is very important to so many of us; the more we can grow our parish family and its ministries, the more we we

will be a blessing to our community, and the more blessings we will receive in turn

as we talk about stewardship, I am conscious that 'stewardship' is unfortunately one of those words that doesn't get much use outside of church; I find that church-specific words are hard for us to relate to our lives; and if they are hard to relate to our lives, then they are hard to put to use; so I'd like to offer this morning another way of thinking about stewardship, one that may help us relate it better to our lives

I want to offer a picture of something from outside of the church, of an activity that most of us are familiar with, of people who are doing something that can help show us what stewardship is all about; the name of this activity even derives from the same origin as the word stewardship does; I'm thinking about stewards (and stewardesses) on airplanes

I know we've heard and seen some horror stories lately of how passengers have been mistreated on airplanes, but put that aside for a minute; I expect we've experienced better examples how stewards work; we might recall times when we've received especially good service from a steward, and we know from experience what a difference it makes when we do receive good service from a steward, from one who truly cares about how they do their job; that shows, and if we've seen it, we know how we've benefitted from it

I imagine that usually, if we were to think of how church compares to an airline flight, we might think of the church members being the passengers, being served by the stewards, the clergy and church staff; but I'd like to get you thinking differently, and suggest that instead, every Christian is a steward, with the job of serving those people who are not yet part of the Christian family; I want us all to imagine ourselves being in the steward's position, because all of us, as Christians, trying to lead a life of good stewardship, are here to serve

the first thing that looking at stewards can tell us is that our stewardship is not about buildings and budgets and programs and supplies; stewards don't fly or maintain the airplanes; our stewardship, like that of stewards, is about serving people; and the buildings and budgets and programs and supplies are only the means through which people are served; so as we are thinking about

our stewardship of giving to the church, remember that all that we give is ultimately for the purpose of providing Christian service to people

the next thing that looking at stewards can tell us is that our stewardship is not for our own purposes; our stewardship, like that of stewards, is about serving other people's needs; no airline could survive if its flights only carried their crews of stewards serving each other; likewise no church can thrive if it only serves its members without reaching outside of itself; so as we are thinking about our stewardship of giving to the church, remember that what we give is ultimately for other people, not for us to keep for ourselves

and the final thing that looking at stewards can tell us is that our stewardship is not about a one-time or once-a-year contribution; our stewardship, like that of stewards, is ongoing; how would we feel on a trip if a steward said, "I've served you your peanuts now, so that's all I can do for you on this flight;" we would wonder, what about beverage distribution and trash pickup and other things that the stewards should do?; so as we are thinking about our stewardship of giving to the church, remember that our need to give is ongoing

whenever you think about stewardship, just remember these comparisons with the stewards on airplanes; all of us, as Christians, are called to live out a life of stewardship; all that we give is for the purpose of serving people, especially other people, and is given on an ongoing basis, throughout our days and years—our whole lives—as Christians; the way we give of our money and of ourselves, the way we do our stewardship, makes a tremendous difference in our lives, and in other people's lives; when we give as stewards who care deeply about how much we give and how we give, and why we give, it shows; we benefit, others benefit, the world benefits, and the family of God grows; we work for the good of all, and especially for those who will be added to the family of faith