

## Proper 24, Year A: 16 October 2011

Okay, here it comes.

We're gearing up for the annual pledge campaign, so you know what to expect after this gospel: it's the "Sermon on the Amount."

Except that I'm not going to do that.

Jesus already delivers that sermon for me in this passage from Matthew, and besides, I'm not convinced—although money makes up over a majority of the parables Jesus tells—that preaching to you about the need to be a cheerful giver makes any difference in the amount you will choose to give to the church...I mean God.

Yes, I want you to give generously for the work of ministry in and through this place. Yes, the Vestry has identified establishing a balanced budget as a priority goal. Yes, I can count real, needed uses for more money for the building, programs and staff.

But I firmly believe that if your hearts are not already turned to generosity... well, there's very little I can say that will convince you. Everyone's circumstances are different, of course. Different people value this congregation in different ways and for different reasons. We all have competing worthy commitments. How generous you can be, or you choose to be, is a very personal decision. So I would simply ask that when you are asked you give freely, not out of feelings of pressure, guilt, or obligation, but with a grateful spirit and an open heart. Give responsibly, keeping in mind that we alone support the choices we have made. As they say, there ain't nobody here but us chickens. But above all, give proudly and joyously and thankfully, in recognition of what God has so richly given you.

God is the most giving reality there is. Without the ongoing gifts of creation, none of us would be here. When we give, we enter—if only briefly and imperfectly—that larger reality of which all giving is a part. To give is to participate in the largest reality of all, and the world of the generous gets larger and larger. God is the most generous reality of all, and the more generous we are, the more we resemble God, and the larger our world becomes.

But here I go getting all mystical on you. Let me therefore leave you with the words of Jesus and with one final question. "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." How do you think Jesus would have answered the question of just what belongs to God? Let that guide you in your giving. Amen.

*This sermon was written by The Rev. Theo Park and delivered at Christ Episcopal Church, Red Wing. Fr. Theo thanks all those whose material he has borrowed and apologizes to those he has overlooked.*