

Hi, this is Bishop David Reed, and I'm delighted to have this opportunity to visit with you today about stewardship in the Diocese of West Texas as our Stewardship Committee offers resources to support congregations and individuals as they think about decisions around their financial giving, as they make decisions about pledging, as they think about the whole notion of stewardship from a Christian perspective.

I'm going to just briefly offer a reminder that "Stewardship is all we do, all the time, with all we have." For Christians, it's all we do, all the time, with all we have in response to the Good News of Jesus Christ. And so, stewardship is not just about money; in fact, only a small part of it is actually about money. It's about how we spend our lives. It's about what we do each day. So, it's not just about money, it's not just about church, it's not just about making a pledge. Those are simply pieces of it and expressions of our practice of stewardship.

For many of our churches, now is the time for every member canvases, for stewardship campaigns. It's a time when church members individually and collectively are invited to consider their giving, their financial giving in particular, for the coming year. And this is a crazy time to be doing this. This is the worst of all possible times. We're in the midst of a time of tremendous financial anxiety and uncertainty. There's uncertainty about what the future is going to be like, what the economy is going to be like next year in 2021. And yet, just as Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, the practice of stewardship is not determined by the environment in which we practice it.

[02:07] Stewardship is all we do, all the time, with all we have in response to the Good News of Jesus Christ. And so, our giving, even in a time of pandemic, is not based on the circumstances around us. It's based on the relationship we have, the relationship we *desire* to have with God and Jesus Christ. Now, for Christians, we look to Jesus as the example of how we might give and our attitude toward giving. And so, we look to him as the one who shows us the way and gives us a way of living. And if stewardship is about how we're living our life, then we look to Jesus for how we practice intentional, conscientious stewardship.

Our stewardship, our financial giving is very personal, but it's not private in the sense that it doesn't have an effect on anybody else. The ability of your congregation to do mission and ministry, and to offer the kind of fellowship and community life that you have, is based almost entirely on the generosity of its members. So, collectively we practice stewardship in our congregations as an expression of our love for the Lord and our intention to follow him as disciples. It's hard to be generous, in some ways. It's hard because this is a time where so much seems closed down and compressed. It's hard to live expansively and confidently because we don't know what's going to happen next. And yet, our God is a God of incredible, unimaginable generosity, from the creation of all that is, to the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, by the sending of his son, by the son who, as it says in Philippians, "pours himself out for our salvation."

[04:19] And so, we are called continually to live generous lives. Again, *despite the circumstances*, we're called to be a generous people. And in a time where so much is closed down, and there's so much limitation and restriction on what we can do, practicing generosity is almost an act of resistance. It's countercultural. Making a pledge is an expression of confidence in God's future, as our pledge is turned toward what is to come.

I would invite you, as you are invited to consider your financial gift to your church, your offering to God through your church for the mission and ministries of the church, the body of Christ, I would invite you to join this resistance against withdrawal and stinginess and fear by being generous, by considering being generous. The church has long taught and upheld the biblical tithe, the offering of a tenth, and our church, The Episcopal Church, has encouraged people to consider proportionate giving, that is pledging an intentional percentage of their resources, their income, as they move and grow toward tithing.

[05:49] It's not always easy, but the tithe, again, is not dependent on the present circumstances. If a person's income goes up, then the amount of their giving increases. If their income goes down, then the dollar amount of their giving goes down. Pledging is, for Christians, giving for the mission and ministry of the Church. It's described as one of the duties of Christians. It's what we're called to, but we're called to it as spiritual practices and as formation for discipleship as we follow a Lord who is mysteriously and *unimaginably* generous in his own self offering.

And so the call for us is, in all things, is participation in God's life and participation in God's redemptive work. And so, giving in and through the church, is not dues paying, it's a spiritual tool, like a lot of other spiritual tools that free us up more to live the kind of life to which we are called, and the life that deep down is our heart's desire.

[07:05] We who are surrounded by grace are encouraged to be mindful of that grace and to be grateful, to be thankful for the many blessings that we have, and such gratitude leads to generosity. We seek to become, *by God's grace*, a gracious people who extend that same kind of grace and generosity that we have received to those we meet. And so, there is that missional and communal part of participating in the offering of ourselves in and through our church, that it frees us. It frees us to do more for the sake of the kingdom. It frees us to respond to the neighbors around us who are in need.

So, I encourage you, when a pledge card comes to consider it a spiritual tool, to consider it an opportunity to grow in grace and also to extend grace to others. The Great Thanksgiving at the Eucharist (Eucharist means Thanksgiving) and so, just as we participate in the Eucharist, so we're invited to be thankful when we are sent out into the world to live thankful lives, to live generously for the life of the world, in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. [08:41]