

A Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Robert R. Hansel on the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 5, 2010 at The Chapel of St. Mark in Port Royal, South Carolina.

A Stewardship Story

The Commissioning of a brand-new Ministry Coordinator for Stewardship is certainly “Sermon enough” for today. So, I won’t try to add a lot to the message. The message is simple and direct: Every one of us and this congregation has a calling from God to shape our entire life—our time, our skills, and our money—in such a way that, at every moment, we are saying THANKS to the One “from whom all blessings flow.” The message is that, far from being a burden, the opportunity to give and to share is always exactly that: **an opportunity**—the only way we can express our gratitude for everything that we have received.

Isn't it interesting that we don't usually see giving as an opportunity? We tend to see it as a sacrifice—an unwarranted intrusion, a threat to take away something that is OURS. We're amazed that anyone would be completely generous and that someone might see a chance to help with the work of God's Kingdom as a blessing.

What I'd like to do this morning is to share with you a very short story which was written by a Jesuit named Anthony de Mello way back in 1984 as part of a collection he titled The Song of the Bird. His stories, parables, and meditations include a wide variety of faith traditions, ancient and modern. They lead the reader to reflect on deep truths about ourselves and our world. This one speaks to me about the stewardship of money:

Uncle Tom had a weak heart and the doctor had warned him and his family to be very careful—to avoid any sudden emotional stress. So when a little while later, the family learned that Tom had unexpectedly inherited a million dollars from a long-lost relative, they feared to break the news to him lest that exciting news might cause Tom to have a heart attack.

So they went to seek the advice of the Pastor of their church, a man known for his kindness, sensitivity, and verbal skills. He assured them that he would think of a way to present the news of Tom's inheritance in a calm and thoughtful way. The Pastor decided to approach the subject initially in a purely hypothetical way, giving the old man time to get used to the general idea of an inheritance before actually telling him the fact that he was about to be fabulously wealthy. “Tell me, Tom.” said the Pastor one Sunday morning in a friendly casual way at the door of the church, “if God, in his infinite mercy, were to suddenly send you a million dollars, what would you do with it?” “Why,” said Tom, “I would give half of it to you for the Church, Pastor Brown.”

When he heard that, the Pastor immediately collapsed with a heart attack!

I really like that little story because it says so clearly how unusual and unexpected it is that people WANT to be good stewards of what God has given them. Even the Preacher can't believe his ears when he hears that Old Tom really “gets it.”

FINALLY, Let me assure you, folks: My heart is pretty sound. And I would welcome your testing it with this kind of generosity whenever the Spirit moves you.