Romans 4.13-end, Mark 8.31-end: Giving Initiative

Today is the Second Sunday of Lent. I spoke last week about how Lent is an invitation to rediscover our point of balance, which pillars are true and which deceive, to rest on God and not on other things which promise comfort they cannot deliver. God calls- he meets us and he sends us to share and speak of his love in the world all around us.

It is a short step, I promise, from that view of Lent to today’s conversation around our readings and the fact that we are using today and the next few weeks to think about our finances at Church. It is only a short step from thinking about God’s provision and blessing poured out upon us and our keeping of Lent and the invitation to spend a bit of time thinking about our giving.

As Christians, we believe that all we have is gift- our time, our skills, our kindness, our money, our friendships, all that we have. They are not ours to choose what we do with them. They are part of God’s position of love towards us and they are given to us so that we can share and spread them as a response to God’s lasting and wonderful love in Jesus Christ. Like the story of the Talents, we are entrusted with them so that we can make a difference in the world, and serve others, and bring the kingdom a little closer by the difference we make. That is not just about our giving to this parish- it is also about what we do with our time and our giftings and our generosity, our lives of service within and outside the Church. It is given in so very many ways, some of them ones we see and admire, some of them in ways we do not. It is not just about our giving to the parish- but it is also, equally, not not about our giving to the parish- by which I mean it is about our financial giving too. Because what we do here costs money and the huge majority of that income comes from us, the people of the church, here in person and joining through the Livestream.

[Lyn Austen to speak here, and then I will finish off]

What we have is gift- and we are called and expected to use what we have been lent to help the Kingdom of God to grow. Paul writes to the Romans about the example we see in Abraham, who believed the promises of God and built his life on them. Despite his great age God told him that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sands on the beach and he expected it to happen. And it did- his faith and trust were counted to him as righteousness. Our acts of confidence, our acts of love, our acts of generosity will be counted to us as righteousness. They are a response to God’s love. They are an expression of our gratitude for all that God has done and continues to do. Reckoned to us as righteousness. And more than that-they are, in the words Jesus says in Mark 8, part of the way that we show our trust in God and our reliance on his love. Our giving shows that we have a different set of values and priorities than we would have if we didn’t know God. Our giving- that we give- shows that we don’t think what we have is given for our own comfort, our own nesting, to fill a bigger and bigger barn. Over and over the Gospels tell us that our talents are not to be buried for our own use, that the bigger barn is just selfishness, that the poor man at the end of our driveway cannot be ignored, that what we do with our time and our money and our heart expresses what we believe and asserts what we think to be important.

The question is often asked: If you were on trial for being a Christian, and the only evidence brought forward was your diary, would you be found guilty? Today we need to add a second bit of evidence- If you were on trial for being a Christian, and the only evidence brought forward were your diary and your bank statement, would you be found guilty?