



## Sermon for the Cathedral Eucharist

## Stewardship Sunday

Readings: Proverbs 3.13-18, 2 Corinthians 4.1-6, Matthew 9.9-13    **21 September 2025**

*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.<sup>1</sup>*

These words open Charles Dickens' novel *The Tale of Two Cities*, set in Paris and London. I don't pretend to be an expert in English literature, but one summary of the novel is that it is a story of how personal action shapes history, embracing themes such as tyranny, fate and self-sacrifice. In our own Cathedral City of Derby we often grapple with a tale of two cities, not two different geographic cities but the one city of Derby, which in the tale of the first Derby, is a heavy industry powerhouse with some of the highest wage-price inflation in the country, and a second city with the highest incidence of child poverty in England. Perhaps as we reflect together on this Stewardship Sunday the idea that Dicken's eloquently surfaces: that personal action can change the flow of history, are poignant for how we act as Christians whom God has placed in Derby, Derbyshire and the wider area can use our personal action to shape the flow of history in a way that makes real [incarnates] our diocesan values of generous faith, courageous hope, and life-giving love. As we reflect together on Christian Stewardship, it strikes me that these values are particularly helpful foundations.

Dickens' novel, despite being a story of two cities, takes place for the most part in Paris in the context of the French Revolution. Which got me thinking about what a contemporary parody might be. So I want to share with you this morning a tale of two crosses.

One cross represents deep fear, the other perfect love,

One cross is reactionary, the other long prophesied

One cross is about populist statement, the other about the very essence of life

One cross rage war, the other brings proclaims peace

One cross divides, the other unites us

One cross attacks, the other brings healing

One cross proclaims death, the other screams life

One cross engages In othering, the other allows us to cry abba Father.

The parody of Paris and London in Dickens' novel, the contrast between affluence and poverty in our own city and the hijacked cross of anti-migration groups, displayed somewhat ironically illegally, on lampposts. around the city and county, versus the cross of Jesus, where even on the cross, Jesus looking down at Mary and the beloved disciple and creating a new family even from a place of remarkable suffering, challenges to our core what it means to be human and what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Today we celebrate the Feast of St Matthew, the Capernaum-born tax-collector, who after being called by Jesus, became an apostle, evangelist and preacher of the Good News. In fact, we believe that as he was killed in an Ethiopian church, he was still preaching about Jesus. Matthew lived, to coin a phrase, a life of two halves and his personal values, motivation and sense of purpose were profoundly different between being a tax collector and an apostle. Today, we are also observing Stewardship Sunday at the Cathedral. This is the Sunday that we all probably dread, as we feel prompted to review our own financial giving. But what I want to explore this morning are the deeper questions of how we steward what God has given us as people of faith, who try to follow Jesus and embody that in our thoughts, words, and actions.

Before we come to this morning's Gospel passage, let's do a whistle-stop tour through the bible on what is meant by 'steward'. In the book of Genesis, we meet Abram and his steward Eliezer, who will inherit Abram's estate. We meet Joseph's steward in Genesis 44.4, who has charge over the house. In the New Testament there are two Greek words used: one which continues the theme of watching over the master's house as in the case of the unjust steward in Luke 16, but also a second meaning where steward implies being given a commission or special responsibility as in Matthew 20 where the workers in the Vineyard are called in to be paid by the foreman or *steward*.

Why and how Jesus eats with people is significant. In Matthew 9, the meal, just beyond our passage, concludes with new wineskins, so the teaching behind the meal is the new life Jesus offers – in this case to Matthew the tax collector.

Romans 8.28 says 'And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are ***called according his purpose***.

What does it mean to be called? Jesus must become central rather than peripheral. Jesus called Matthew to follow Him, and seemingly without hesitation, Matthew got up from his tax-collector's booth and shared the meal of new life with Jesus. We often make the mistake in the Christian faith of equating ordination with the 'call'; it is, of course, a call, but the primary and

more important call is the one to follow Jesus. When we move from being socially or intellectually Christian to responding to Jesus' call to follow him, we surrender control of our lives to Jesus. It's the movement from belief to obedience. And the point I want to make is that in calling you and me, we are called for a purpose. And part of that purpose is to steward the gift of faith we received when we were called by Jesus to follow him. So, we hold this precious faith, and we have a responsibility to steward that faith well. Or to go back to Dicken's and *The Tale of Two Cities* we need to be aware that our personal actions change the flow of history.

So, what does it mean to be a good steward, following Jesus' example? Stewardship isn't just about money—it's about how we manage everything God entrusts to us: our time, abilities, relationships, and even creation itself. From the beginning, God's people have been called to wise and faithful stewardship, reflecting God's heart to the world (Genesis 1:26-28). Though sin distorts this calling, Jesus shows us what true stewardship looks like<sup>2</sup>:

**Use your God-given abilities.**

In the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25), Jesus teaches us to use our gifts—skills, time, opportunities—for God's kingdom, not to hide them away.

**Serve the needs of others.**

Jesus washed his disciples' feet (John 13), showing that stewardship is humble service, not seeking status but caring for others.

**Make the most of your time.**

Jesus always made time for the marginalised and hurting. Good stewardship means prioritising people and using our time for the good of others.

**Be prepared for sacrifice.**

The cross is the ultimate act of stewardship—Jesus giving his life for us (Mark 10:45). Sometimes, stewardship means costly generosity and putting others first.

**Care for creation.**

From Genesis to the risen Christ mistaken for a gardener (John 20:15), we're reminded that caring for God's world is part of our calling.

So, stewardship is about how we live, not just what we give. Jesus calls us to steward our whole lives—gifts, time, relationships, and the world itself—with generous faith, courageous hope, and life-giving love.

Let us pray...

Lord, because you made me, I owe you the whole of my love;

because you redeemed me, I owe you the whole of my life;

because you have promised so much, I owe you my whole being.

I owe you as much more love than myself as you are greater than I,

for whom you gave yourself and to whom you promised yourself.

I pray you, Lord, make me taste by love what I taste by knowledge;

let me know by love what I know by understanding.

I owe you more than my whole self, but I have no more,

and by myself I cannot render the whole of it to you.

Draw me to you, Lord, in the fullness of your love.

I am wholly yours by creation; make me all yours, too, in love.

– Anselm Of Canterbury 1033-1109 AD

The Venerable Matthew Trick, Residentiary Canon