

Update on St Mary's Vision and Finance

During July three open sessions were held to enable people to hear more about the Vision for St Mary's over the next few years, and to learn about the financial challenges that are emerging. The sessions saw lively conversation about what happens next—and feedback on what was discussed and the questions asked is available on the Vision and Values page of the church website.

An immediate key issue is the process for developing children's and youth work following the decision not to extend Ryan's contract. A small group is exploring options at present and they will report back to the PCC in October. It is intended that a clear view on the way forward, including a timetable for any appointment, would be in place by the end of the calendar year.

So what now.....

Over the next few weeks please take the opportunity to prayerfully consider the ways in which you may be able to support and help St Mary's in its life and activities. We rely on the gifts, talents and skills of so many, and there are always opportunities for more to join in.

One of the reasons for bringing forward Gift Sunday from its usual time in November is to help plan the budget for the next few years. Having a clearer picture of our income from planned giving is vital in setting a realistic budget. Every new or increased amount of giving, however small or large, is both vital and valuable for our vision to continue to be carried out. **If you are able please take a moment to review your giving using the enclosed response leaflet.**

If you would like more information, or an chance to talk through any questions or comments on the Vision please speak to the David, Dan or Michael, or the churchwardens and treasurer.



The 23 September, Gift Sunday, will be an opportunity to celebrate the many gifts, talents and resources that God provides for growing God's Kingdom through St Mary's Princes Risborough, and to review again our own response in light of God's generosity. The name may have changed, from 'Thank you to God Sunday' or 'Stewardship Sunday', but the emphasis and theme is similar.

Over the next three weeks our services will explore some biblical foundations on God's provision. The topics and readings for each week are shown below. This leaflet provides a study outline overleaf for today's talk. Similar leaflets will be available for the next two Sundays.

9 th September	Possessions – who does the possessing?	*Psalm 24 Luke 12: 22-32	Explore the nature of God's ownership of all things. Key question is how can we cultivate a sense of dedication of all we own to God?
16 th September	Stewardship – for whom, for what and when?	James 4: 13-16 *Matthew 25: 31-46	Explore the idea of stewardship – stewardship of God's provision and stewardship of our gifts and talents. Key question is how does an attitude of stewardship change how money is used?
23 rd September	Giving – the real investment	*2Cor.8:1-5,13-15; 9:12-15 Luke 18: 18-30	Explore the idea that giving is as central to Christian life as prayer. Giving is an act that helps dethrones money as 'god'.

Possessions—who does the possessing?

The opening verse of Psalm 24 is unequivocal:

‘The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers’.

God stakes ownership of all things by virtue of creation, and the very nature of God as creator. Sometimes it’s tempting to limit God’s ownership to the physical or natural world— rivers, seas, mountains, rocks etc—the raw materials which God has provided for us to use. But God’s ownership of all things extends to just that, all things—our creativity, innovation and discovery, the products of our handiwork.

If God truly owns all things, then we face a serious challenge. How to cultivate a sense of dedication to God of all that we own?

A time to reflect:

Mentally place all that you have in the collection plate, not just what you give. Positively justify what of God’s you keep not just what you give.

Jesus’ ministry illustrated through parables, teaching and example a way of living that recognised God’s ownership of all things. Jesus was at his most incisive (and challenging) when talking about the way possessions can be a barrier to seeing God in action—Jesus’ encounter with the rich young man (Luke 18: 18-27) or his teaching during the sermon of the mount (Matthew 6:24) are just a couple of the many examples in the gospels.

A time to reflect:

Read through the story of the rich young man, or another passage you know where Jesus talks about possessions. Take a moment to identify where and what your ‘treasure’ is?

Jesus’ teaching is an invitation to develop a Godly approach to possessions. This is not an easy task—none (individuals or organisations) are immune from the pull of acquiring and possessing. A first step maybe to recognise the culture of practical materialism that is the constant back drop to our lives. Materialism is ultimately an attitude of heart that views the material world as all that is real—the danger is that we learn to love things and use people to service our need. The counter-cultural challenge of Jesus is to learn to love people and use things for God’s service.

A time to reflect:

Read the story of Simon the magician in Acts 8: 18-24. His understanding of the ‘way of the world’ was that if you paid enough you could have whatever you want. His view was turned upside down through his encounter with God. What do you find encouraging about Simon’s experience—what challenges does it raise for you?

Jesus knew well the importance that possessions play in creating a sense of security and well-being from his encounters during his ministry—and today we continue to search for security, to know that we are valued and to feel safe. Jesus’ message was a reminder (a challenge) that the search for security through possessions alone will not succeed. Security comes through meaningful relationships with God and with others, and that true security is found in God’s provision. This is what Jesus tells his disciples in Luke 12: 22-32.

A time to reflect:

‘Ultimately, there is no way to share: either our confidence is in God or it is in our savings account. To claim that we can thus insure ourselves and still put our trust in God is to add hypocrisy to mistrust.’ Is this what Jesus means when he tells his disciples not to worry about tomorrow (Luke 12: 22-32). What do you think? What difference would it make?