

Christ Church Cathedral
Fredericton, NB

Sunday, October 19, 2003 Pentecost 19

A sermon by Dean Keith Joyce
"The Church - where the stewardship tire hits the road"

1 Peter 2:9-10 [NRSV]

⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Very simply, when we are baptised we enter the church, we become part of the church. We look at life and live life from the perspective of belonging to the church. It is very much part of our identity as followers of Christ. It's not something we add onto our lives - though we may function that way.

It's not an optional extra we take in when we are so inclined. We are (you could add 'already' here) members of the Church. We may be good members, or bad; we may be indifferent. Zeal for the church may vary throughout our lifetime.

Experience of Church can be wonderful, or it can be disastrous. Church can be a great source of joy. It can also be the cause of great pain. We must remember that we belong to the church not because we chose to belong but because God made us into the Church. And the ongoing work - miraculous work - of the Church is a direct result of God the Holy Spirit.

It is through the work of the Spirit in the sacrament of baptism and with faith in Jesus Christ that we belong to God, and therefore belong to the Church, which He has made.

Belonging to God means we have identity, an identity given by God himself. The character of God identifies us. That's a given. As St. Peter says, we are God's own, we belong to him, and we are his. We are marked as Christ's own forever. We know this from the baptismal service. We are marked indelibly with the sign of the cross. This makes us the people of God.

So when we talk about stewardship we are not talking about raising money for some religious institution. We are not talking about volunteering in some good works organisation that helps people. It's not a matter of us sharing

our capabilities out of the kindness of our heart. Perhaps this is putting it too crudely, but stewardship becomes using time and money and capabilities that God has given us for the sake of the Church and its mission.

When we give our money it goes to the Church, which is us, so that we can do the work of the ministry God has given his Church to do.

Yes, the motivation for giving and the object of our giving is God himself. But it does nonetheless end up with us. The giving of our time - well, we are the ones who benefit from it because it enables us - not some organization over there - to minister. We in God's service gain or suffer according to what and how we give, whether it is time or money or skills. And it all affects our very selves because we the people are the Church. It is who we are. We are Church.

What do you think of this!? On Tuesday afternoon for 2 to 3 hours, I am going to go to the 'Joyce' and give my time to the 'Joyce' and express my talents with others who are at the 'Joyce' and drop off some money for the 'Joyce,' well, because the 'Joyce' has to fix up its 'Joyce centre' and needs to support someone to look after the 'Joyce' interests.

Well.....of course not! I am Joyce. It's my identity. It's not something apart from me, situated over there somewhere. And what I do as Joyce affects me directly, very directly. I can't escape being Joyce.

It's the same thing with Church. We not only belong to it, it's essential to our identity. What we do affects us directly, very directly. We can't escape being Church. We are Church even when we are not in this building, or not participating in Church life.

And how we are as Church either glorifies God or it doesn't. It either lives out his purposes for it or it fails to do so. And while we acknowledge that the formation of the Church is all God's doing, in many ways it is up to us.

For matters of Stewardship how we give corresponds directly to how we live out being the Church God has formed us to be.

That's why it's in the Church where the Stewardship tire hits the road.