

St Nicholas' Anglican Church, Mordialloc, Sunday 8th September, 2019 (Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost)

Revd Dr Sharne Rolfe, Vicar

Readings:

Jeremiah 18:1-11

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-18

Philemon 1-25

Luke 14:25-35

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

Sermon: Stewardship Sunday

Today is an important day in the life of our parish. It is Stewardship Sunday, and in a moment I will be handing over to our Hon. Treasurer, Arthur Robertson, to speak with you about the importance of committed, godly stewardship of our parish, and in particular about financial giving to sustain the work of God in this place. It costs around \$150,000 a year to run a parish such as ours, with a full-time priest, and church buildings and grounds and a vicarage to maintain. Many people are under the incorrect impression that the money to run a parish such as ours comes from the organisation, the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, to which we belong. This is not true. The Diocese does not pay my stipend, and the Diocese does not maintain our buildings and grounds. Every dollar that we need to run our parish must be raised by our community, through regular financial giving and through fund-raising. This year, we added a very successful fundraiser, the mid-winter Gilbert and Sullivan musical evening, to our efforts to keep our parish afloat financially. But still, our financial situation remains very delicate. I'm sure Arthur is going to say a bit more about that in a moment when I hand over to him. But before I do that I want to just say a word or two about our Scripture readings for today.

It is a remarkable thing how often Scripture speaks directly to our condition at that very moment. Scripture tells it as it is, giving us wise guidance in regard to challenges we might be facing, or conflicts we are trying to resolve, or sadnesses we are living through. Today, we have four most beautiful readings that seem very apropos to a day on which we reflect prayerfully on what we can give to support the work of ministry in this parish:

- from God through Jeremiah, the image of the Lord as the master potter, shaping and reworking his people and their destiny according to the righteousness or otherwise of their ways and doings
- from Psalm 139, the image of the inescapable God: “O Lord, you have searched me and known me .. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me ... I come to the end - I am still with you.”
- from the whole of Paul’s letter to Philemon, a plea for compassion by one brother in Christ to another, reminding us all that through Christ, we all become brothers and sisters in the family of God, responsible for each other, and
- in our reading from Luke, a very timely reminder of the costs of discipleship, as Jesus says: “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” Furthermore, Jesus also warns in this passage of the need for all of us to estimate the true costs of our discipleship as part of our commitment to Christ, so that we might not only build a solid foundation but see the project through!

Any one of these readings today might easily be used as an encouragement to us all on this day of Stewardship reflection. If we are truly a community of Christ, it is our mutual responsibility to ensure the Christian endeavours we enact here are able to continue, and that we each and every one of us contribute as generously as we can to that endeavour. I commend to you the work of God in this parish. We thank God for it. And we pray that each and every member of our community will give as generously as they are able so that we as the community of St Nicholas’ continue not just to survive, but to grow and to flourish as God would want us to do in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.