

**St. James' Episcopal Church**  
**Diocese of Newark**  
**Hackettstown, New Jersey**  
**Stewardship Sunday Sermon 10/26/03**  
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**Stewardship of the Faith**

Conservation is often used as a synonym for stewardship. But, the goal of stewardship can be defeated if conservation is thought of only as conservatism. Conservatism in the church usually opposes change. But change is here whether we like it or not. Conservation in the church seeks to preserve and maintain the things most valued but considers change in order to have them in the future, a future that likely will face no fewer changes than we here at St. James' have faced in over 100 years of existence. On this Stewardship Sunday, we must deal with change while considering how best to maintain the fabric of our faith. And what is the warp and weft of that fabric? Christ's admonition to: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and "Love your neighbor as yourself." This is the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

We're all familiar with the Parable in Luke 19 about the noble who traveled to a distant country, how he gave ten of his servants gold coins and told them, 'Engage in trade with these until I return.' Upon returning, he called the servants in to learn what they had gained by trading. One earned ten additional coins, another five but one kept his stored away because he was afraid he would lose it if invested. The noble asked, "Why did you not put my money in a bank? Then on my return I would have collected it with interest." The coin was given to the servant who earned the ten additional coins. Said the noble, "I tell you, to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

Stewardship is not the status quo; stewardship is an investment in the future by wisely using the gifts God has given us, not just the gifts of money and resources, but the gift of love. You wouldn't know that today from the reactionary howls over the upcoming ordination of Rev. Gene Robinson, a homosexual in a committed relationship. I'll bet you didn't think this debate in our church and society was really a skirmish over stewardship, a battle between those who would hoard their coin and those who will invest theirs, a campaign between those receptive to the movement of God's Spirit in the world and those whose hearts are closed to that movement, and a holy war between those who spout the Great Commandment and Commission and those who live it. But it is.

One example of this great debate is the "Call to Action" issued by the American Anglican Council's "A Place to Stand" Conference in Texas, a group opposed to Robinson's ordination and same-sex blessings. I'd like comment upon it as I strongly oppose the positions expressed in it. [source of the "Call": American Anglican Council – text is in italics, my interlineated comments follow in bold]

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

*As Anglican Christians committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, under the authority of Holy Scripture, and members of God's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church:*

1. *We proclaim our Lord's Great Commandment and His Great Commission to be our life's highest calling.*

**Let's repeat that Commandment and Commission again – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”**

2. *We repudiate the 74th General Convention's confirmation of a non-celibate homosexual to be a bishop of the Church and its acceptance of same-sex blessings as part of our common life. These actions have broken fellowship with the larger body of Christ and have brought the Episcopal Church under God's judgment.*

**How convenient that, after immediately rejecting the Great Commandment and Commission in this Call to Action, they claim they can discern God's judgment, a judgment they assume will ratify their fears and prejudices. Study the Gospels and you will not find one word from our Lord indicating that God's judgment vindicates anyone's fears and prejudices.**

3. *We repent of our part in the sins of the Episcopal Church, and we pray for all those who are being hurt and led astray by these actions.*

**Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, thinking less than clearly, said that two groups are being hurt in this debate. “One group of course is the homosexual community ... and the other group is those from small and struggling churches, often in the developing world, who feel excluded, overruled and ignored.” Well, because I'm in favor of Gene Robinson being Bishop and in favor of blessing committed unions irrespective of sexual preference, I'm hurt that others reject them. Therefore, I'm proud to say that, based on Dr. William's determination that there are only two camps hurting, I am now part of the homosexual community! So are millions of other straight Episcopalians. And who's being “lead astray” as claimed in this statement? That's code to express a phobia that the so-called gay lifestyle is contagious. Get real! Would you willingly choose a lifestyle that could cut you off from jobs, family, friends and church? Does this Dallas convention really want something to be afraid of? Let them be afraid of the sin they commit by categorizing someone by what they do in a bedroom with the consenting adult they love and not by who they are. The church is not here to support such categorization. It is here to tell you that the love of Jesus negates any such human categorization. And if third-world churches have to deal with that when surrounded by societies that support polygamy and the subjugation of woman, tough! No one said living God's word was easy. Ask any homosexual Episcopalian, Roman Catholic or Baptist!**

4. *We call the leadership of the Episcopal Church to repent of and reverse the unbiblical and schismatic actions of the General Convention.*

**This is the key point that needs to be rebutted again and again. You cannot read the New Testament with an open heart and think that anyone can be cut off from God's love and participation in God's church. The New Testament message of love will always trump the rules of Leviticus. Many of those rules, such as killing disrespectful children or woman whose heads are uncovered at services, etc., are ludicrous. God's Spirit in the world negated those “rules” ages ago. God's Spirit in the world in this age is joining us to our**

homosexual brothers and sisters. God's love has broken into human experience throughout the ages and that love has broken through now to join together all men and women, straight and gay, in the Church of Jesus Christ. Those who ignore that breakthrough, who try to bottle up the freedom and joy from God's love in action, not only fight against the tide, they engage in the ultimate sin – they willingly separate themselves from God's love. As the Old Testament reading this morning said, they are “transgressing and denying the Lord and turning away from following our God, talking oppression and revolt, conceiving lying words and uttering them from the heart. Justice is turned back and righteousness stands at a distance.” As in today's reading from the Gospel, let those who were in Dallas throw off their cloaks, hear Jesus, and regain their sight.

5. *We declare our commitment to the Lord's life-giving teaching about sexuality and marriage embraced by Christians throughout all ages, and as affirmed by the 1998 Lambeth Conference. We celebrate God's unconditional love for all people, and we proclaim God's transforming power for everyone seeking sexual purity and wholeness.*

That last sentence is more code for the great hypocrisy, “We don't hate homosexuals. After all, we love the sinner and only hate the sin.” When the so-called sin is loving the person you're with because of your innate and God-given sexual preference that cannot change but only be repressed, these Dallas folks don't proclaim or practice God's love for all. They love only those homosexuals who repress the normal desire to physically love the willing adult object of their affection. As with the Pharisees, they would limit God's love only to those like themselves. They can't.

6. *We redirect our financial resources, to the fullest extent possible, toward biblically orthodox mission and ministry, and away from those structures that support the unrighteous actions of the General Convention. We will support our partners in the Anglican Communion.*

If you can't convince them by scripture, tradition or reason, let's sock 'em in the pocketbook. Let's hide those coins just as the servant in the parable hid them. I guess they forgot the ending of the parable in the same way that they forgot the Great Commandment and the Great Commission when drafting and approving this call to prejudice.

7. *We appeal to the Primates of the Anglican Communion to intervene in the Episcopal Church to:*

- a. Discipline those bishops in the Episcopal Church who, by their actions, have departed from biblical faith and order;*
- b. Guide the realignment of Anglicanism in North America;*
- c. Encourage orthodox bishops as they extend episcopal oversight, pastoral care, and apostolic mission across current diocesan boundaries; and*
- d. Support isolated and beleaguered parishes and individuals in their life and witness as faithful Anglican Christians.*

*To the glory of God. Amen.*

There isn't much "glory of God" in that text, is there? It seems rather mean and small when you think of real people instead of stereotypes, when you think of Gene Robinson or a gay friend in the parish rather than the demonized "impure homosexual." Sadly, the Anglican Communion Primates seem to be intervening on the wrong side of this war but even they can't quell God's love. I don't believe God will allow the Anglican Communion outside of the United States and Canada to hide its coin for long. If it does, as with the hoarding servant who hid his coin, "even what he has will be taken away." Stewardship of the faith isn't excluding members of the Church of Christ, stewardship of the faith requires us to expand our horizons and invest our coins in the inclusive love of God. The funds you give St. James, a church open to and supportive of all, a church this Dallas crowd likely would find under God's judgment, unbiblical and unrighteous, will enable it to continue and expand its mission of hope, support and love. I hope you will consider my thoughts when considering your pledge.