



**Proper 27, Year B – October 4, 2009**  
Stewardship Theme

**A Homily preached by the Rev'd Canon M. Ansley Tucker**

Today begins the launch of our annual Stewardship and Financial appeal here at Christ Church. Over the next month, leading up to Covenant Sunday on October 25, you will hear plenty about the work and needs of Christ Church – and especially, our financial needs.

However, I want to focus today less on Christ Church and our needs than on our *selves*. Specifically, I want to describe a spirituality of giving which is rooted in Judaism.

The Jewish word which most closely approximates what Christians have meant by “charity” is “*tzedakah*.” But there are important differences.

First of all, Christians tend to think of charitable giving as “voluntary” – a “freewill offering,” if you like. By contrast, *tzedakah* is considered a *mitzvah* – or an obligation – laid upon every adult Jew [every Jew who has been bar- or bat-*mitzvahed*.] Even the poorest of Jews has an obligation to perform *tzedakah* – with the proviso that in so doing, a Jew is not to put him or herself in need of someone else’s charity.

Secondly, the English word “charity” – indeed even the English word “love” – does not quite capture the spirit of *tzedakah*. The Hebrew word “*tzedek*” refers to righteousness, or justice. To perform *tzedakah* is matter of righteousness, therefore, or putting to rights the inequities of the world. It is about ensuring that the poor and the needy have returned to them the things they need in order to prosper – and that includes everything from money, to land, to respect. I submit that when we think of our gifts in terms of furthering the righteousness of a just God, we may come to think of them, and of ourselves as givers, differently.

I have found the concept of *tzedakah* extraordinarily helpful as a tool for examining my own heart and generosity. I also find it helpful to recognize that *tzedakah* would have been known and practised by Jesus himself. Once you know a bit more about it, you will see how clearly it informed his numerous teachings about wealth, money, and giving.

Now, in the twelfth century the legendary Jewish rabbi Maimonides classified the forms of *tzedakah* into eight categories, ranking them from greatest (or most worthy) to least. This classification persists to this day. Here they are:

(1) The most meritorious form of charity is to give someone the ability to be self-reliant. In other words, we afford the recipient the dignity of not having to be in the debt of anyone.

(2) To give anonymously to an unknown recipient – which is to say, neither the giver nor the recipient knows the identity of the other. This is a double-blind gift. The donor doesn’t get to pick the cutest orphan in the catalogue, and therefore surrenders control over how his or her gift is deployed.

(3) To give *tzedakah* anonymously to a known recipient. The point here is that the donor knows who is benefiting from his or her gift, but the recipient never

learns the identity of his or her benefactor, and is thus free from feeling beholden to him or her.

(4) To give *tzedakah* publicly to an unknown recipient – in other words, you don't know the recipient's identity, but they sure know yours. Think here of the phenomenon of "naming opportunities". You make a donation (let's say to install an elevator in your parish church: you don't know exactly who will benefit by your gift, but the beneficiaries all know that they are riding the Mary Smith elevator.) It is still a very worthy form of *tzedakah*, just not quite so worthy as if had you done it without looking for recognition.

(5) To give before you are asked. You probably know that it is axiomatic amongst fundraisers that the number one reason people don't give to a particular charity is that no one asked. Stories abound of faithful Anglicans who leave their estate to the Salvation Army, rather than to their own parish church. And why? Because the Salvation Army asked, and the parish church assumed. And yet, this the fifth highest form of *tzedekah* sees the donor giving *without* being asked. This kind of charity requires you to be someone who is conscientiously attuned to the needs and injustices around you, and also to understand how redemptive it can be to save another person from having to come and ask you to help them.

(6) To give adequately after being asked. The difference here is that you've made someone *wait* for what they need. You've made them come and tell you that they can't manage without you. But, to your great credit, you do respond "adequately." Now this observation invites to consider what we mean by an "adequate" gift. I take it we are saying two things. First our gift is commensurate with the need. The truth is, this may require us to re-think our priorities. None of us has infinite resources, but in the face of great need (let's say, our adult child has an accident is no longer able to work), an "adequate" response may include spending our golf time babysitting, or re-directing our charitable donations to home care. Secondly, an adequate gift takes account of our personal capacity to give. We are to give in proportion to what we have.

(7) To give willingly, but inadequately – for example, to give \$20 without hesitation for tsunami relief when you can afford \$200. You are still performing *tzedakah*, but there remains in your heart what Christians would call a "spirituality of scarcity" – either you just don't "get" the magnitude of the problem, or for whatever reason, you feel a need to hang on to your resources, in case they will come in handy for something else later.

(8) To give "in sadness." This, the least meritorious of the forms of *tzedakah*, is to give, but to do so grudgingly (I'll fill out the bleepity-bleep pledge card, but I'm sick to the teeth of always being asked to dig deeper. What did that Church ever do for *me*?) Notice how far short this response falls first, of *tzedakah* which performed without even being asked, but even more importantly, of the idea that *tzedakah* isn't about "me" anyway! I should note that there is a second, slightly different, interpretation of "giving in sadness," which is that one is giving out of a sense of pity, rather than religious obligation. We don't much like to think of being motivated by obligation or "duty" these days, and so it may be hard for us to grasp what is wrong with being motivated by sympathy. The point, I think, is that such giving is dependent upon someone managing to touch our hearts, or having to persuade me emotionally: in other words, I will only give if I feel sorry for you. The problem is that not all need is pitiable. The problem is that there is something just a bit patronizing about pity.

So, there you have it: eight kinds of *tzedakah* or charity, from the most worthy to the least worthy. I offer these to you because one of the dangers inherent in any fundraising effort -- be it an annual appeal or a capital campaign -- is that fundraisers (and this includes parish Stewardship Committees) can get overly focused on the gift, rather than the giver. But we are the Church, and I am a priest -- and it is, I believe, equally our business to focus on the heart of the donor. We are called, each and everyone of us, to examine our own philanthropic motives and practices, and to grow not just in largesse, but in spirit. Our Jewish brothers and sisters have much to teach us in this regard.

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