

**Sunday Sermon**  
**October 21, 2018**  
**Mark 10:35-45**  
**“True Greatness”**

### Introduction

Sunday worship had ended, and people were clearing out after visiting with each other. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a man sitting on the bench in the entrance. I knew he was not a member, and I knew why he was there. He was there to ask for assistance.

I also knew the rules that we pastors are taught, “Do not give out assistance, especially cash, on Sunday mornings.” I had broken that rule once, and in the weeks that followed, ushers found individuals out in the parking lot panhandling people as they came to worship.

“Do not give out cash; do not give out cash,” I repeated as I walk to the back.

The man said he needed some meat for his family. I told him we did not have any meat at the church, and we did not give out cash, that we gave our contributions and our members volunteered at the ministry center and the local soup kitchen. They were better equipped to help families. I told him we had a few canned goods still at the church from a recent collection. I could give him some cans of beans and vegetables.

“We have vegetables,” he said. “We just need some meat.”

He knows we only have canned goods, I thought. This is a gimmick. He has figured out a request that will get him cash. “Do not give out cash,” the rule echoed in my head. But in my heart I thought, “Have I become a cynic? Am I really seeing this man, or just seeing who I presume he is?”

The man and I went through the drill. I told him about the church in town that had a food pantry and about the Salvation Army nearby, and about the hours of the ministry center. He said he knew about those places. Finally, I said I was sorry we could not help him, and he went out the door, and I went on to a meeting.

And just about every day that week I thought about that man. Did I do enough? Should I have gone with him or gotten someone else to go with him to Food Lion to buy some meat for his family? Should I have gotten his name and contact information? Could I have done more? Did I do enough?

### I

Another story: It was the day of the dedication of the new multi-million dollar Tucker Student Center at Gardner-Webb University. Greetings had been extended; the architects and the builders had been recognized.

Then speaking on behalf of the donors, the Tucker family, Carolyn Tucker, with her husband Robert Tucker by her side, shared their desire that the student

center would be a place where students grow to love the Lord God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. A prayer of dedication was offered, and the ribbon was cut. A brief celebratory video presentation of the features of the Center concluded the program.

But as the postlude music began to play and the crowd rose to leave, something happened. Mr. Tucker slowly made his way back to the podium. The music stopped. Some in the crowd sat down while others simply stood still. Everyone listened politely to the man whose family had been so generous in giving this multi-million dollar building to the university.

Mr. Tucker proceeded to share a story from many years earlier when he and Mrs. Tucker were visiting New York City. It was during the winter, and a light snow was falling. As they walked, Mr. Tucker looked across the street and saw a homeless man. Making his way toward the man, Mr. Tucker took some money out of his wallet and gave it to the man.

“To this day,” Mr. Tucker said. “that man’s face is etched in my mind, and I often wonder to myself, Did I give enough?”

Then Mr. Tucker announced that he was not sure he had done enough. He would be giving an additional \$500,000 to the university toward needs for the building and its programming for the students.

Tucker’s daughter, Lisa, later shared that she heard that story many times growing up, because that experience had brought defining questions to her father’s life: “Did I give enough? Did I do enough?”

## II

If you are like most churchgoers, when I say “stewardship,” you immediately think money. But if I say “steward,” different images come to mind, or perhaps no image at all. In fact, if I were to ask those here who are stewards to stand, you might wonder whether or not to rise to your feet.

“Stewardship,” a word we hear around church, is often misunderstood. It is not just about money, but rather a lifelong spiritual commitment that asks, “Did I do enough?” “Steward,” a word we seldom use, is even more misunderstood. Yet understanding who we are as stewards informs our understanding of how we practice stewardship.

A steward is the opposite of an owner. A steward is a caretaker, a manager, an overseer, a servant. A steward manages someone else’s property, oversees in trust that which is not his or hers. Our calling as people who bear the name of Christ is not to act not as owners but rather as stewards of what belongs to God. And coming to know that difference is can be life-changing, life-defining, life-giving.

## III

In our scripture lesson, Jesus has for the third time tried to tell his disciples

about his upcoming death. But the disciples do not understand what Jesus is saying. Perhaps they do not want to understand.

James and John, the disciples who are brothers, believe Jesus is God's anointed messiah, come to establish God's kingdom on earth. And boldly and brashly, they ask Jesus to grant them places of honor, positions of prestige. They are thinking earthly kingdom, with a court and a throne, advisers and officers, an army and a treasury, not kingdom of God.

And they are confused about their roles in God's kingdom. They are acting like they are part owners, not stewards. And like what we see repeated over and over in our world, they get caught up in strategizing for personal power and profit, rather than being stewards and servants for the trust they are given.

To be in Christ, to become like the Christ whose name we bear, to live as "died-for" people, is to be more concerned with caring than with keeping; more concerned with giving than with getting; more concerned with sharing than with possessing.

Sometimes we call what we do here in worship with offering plates the collection. But really it is not a collection. Bill collectors collect. Stewards give back out of care and gratitude and respect for what the Lord has entrusted. The offering is not a collection; it is a giving back. And without it, worship is not complete.

We could put offering plates or debit machines at the back of the sanctuary for worshippers to use as they leave. But instead, we pass the plates in the service, because giving back is a part of worship, our response to the abundant life we have received in Christ.

## Conclusion

We are called to be stewards of what God has given us.

Yes, we need to be responsible and practice good stewardship in the ways we respond to needs around us, so that those ways of responding are beneficial to all concerned.

And we need to guard our hearts from becoming cynical or hardened to those in need.

But most of all, we need to keep asking:

Did I do enough? Did I give enough?

Because the way we answer those questions is indeed:  
life-defining and life-giving.

May it be so for each of us. Amen.