

Fellow followers of Christ and visitors, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gathering for worship on Canada Day gives us great cause for thanksgiving, praise, honour, and glory to God.

Somewhere this week end we will probably hear that great Canadian song, *This Land is Your Land* . . . I would like to change those words to something like this, This land is God's land, not yours and my land, and put the focus where it belongs. Who we are in this great land are stewards, not owners. We are stewards in a physical sense of the universe God has made, and in a spiritual sense of the mysteries of God in Christ who redeemed the world and promised life forever.

In the Scriptures steward is the word used to describe a person who is put in charge of the owner's property. God created the universe and humankind, you and I, to be its steward. Today as we reflect on God's Word I encourage us to think of ourselves as stewards, not owners, stewards, given charge over God's creation which includes all that we have in our possession, and, stewards of the grace given to us to live in God's presence forever.

The story of God's message to Israel in their exile in the first reading from Jeremiah is a strong directive as to what to do as stewards. Israel had been exiled from the land God had given them to 'possess', not own, into Babylonia. Jeremiah gave them God's message to carry on there just as if they were in Israel: ***“Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters . . . marry . . . seek the welfare of the city where you live . . . and pray for it.”*** God assures them he has plans for them and will be with them.

Worship will end today with the singing of “O Canada, our home and native land.” Using our national anthem as an expression of worship gave me a struggle. There are a number of you here for whom Canada is not a native land. The other issue is the prayer part of our anthem: “God keep our land”. This is not our land, this is God's land and we are its stewards.

Like 'exiles' many of you came here to live and the word of God through Jeremiah stands strong. ***“Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters . . . marry . . . seek the welfare of the city where you live . . . and pray for it.”*** God is present here in this land, a land God has called into being with his creating Word, a land intended to be possessed by those who live here fulfilling God's plan for creation, that we be its stewards and receiving God's gift of redemption in our misuse, abuse and sin to be as Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus. ***“For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepare beforehand to be our way of life.”***(Eph.2:10) So I would also rewrite O Canada – our home, the gift of God . . . God keep this land.

We are stewards, stewards of life and all that God gives to sustain it, redeem it, and keep it. Jesus puts it into perspective for us in the Gospel today. The political powers of the day, the Pharisees (church leaders), and Herodians (the political party in power) at least 12 times according to Mark's Gospel set out to trap Jesus to find a reason to arrest and do away with him. This one seemed like a clincher. How sly and conniving their question. ***“Teacher, we know***

that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" Asking for a coin he said to them. *"Whose head is this, and whose title?" "They answered, 'The emperor's'"* We know Jesus response. *"Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's."* He took the wind right out of their sails and conveyed to them God's will for government. Paul repeated it in the second reading. *"Let every person be subject to the higher authorities . . ."* *"Be a good citizen. All governments are under God."*(Peterson) Complaining about taxes and government is an everyday activity, but the truth stands. Under God respect the governing powers. They are there for our good.

It is the second part of Jesus teaching that needs our attention. "Give to God the things that are God's". This world and the universe beyond are God's, everything from our back yards to the invisible waves that carry our emails and skypes. We honour God with our stewardship.

This creation is traumatized with strife and bitterness, hatred and lovelessness, the forces of nature and human failure and the unseen activity of demonic power. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. We give God praise for our redemption and salvation.

The eventual demise of our social fabric is shattered in the ever present activity of the Holy Spirit calling us to be the people God made us – followers of the way of Christ. We give thanks to God with our living.

Are we stewards or owners? As stewards in the political arena in which we live Paul's advice is simple. *"Pay taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due and honour to whom honour is due."* Paul does not stop here. *"Owe no one anything except to love one another"*, he continues, and concludes with the words, *"love is the fulfilling of the law."* Those religious and political leaders who came to trap Jesus must have been directed by his admonition to "give God what is God's" to the great commandments: Love the Lord, your God, with all you heart and mind and soul, and love your neighbour as yourself. Love of God and neighbour is the making of the steward. Love of God makes no claim on what is mine and what is yours. John writes. *"love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love."*(Jn. 4:7.8)

It is one thing to do one's duty, pay your bills, take good care of one's property, make a good accounting of one's possessions, but it is another do do all this with love, love of God and love for one's neighbour, being a steward. St. Peter's words are a fitting conclusion. *"Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received."*(1 Pet. 4:10) Amen.