I have a vague memory from childhood of a yearly TV event called *Battle of the Network Stars*. The show brought together TV celebrities from, what were then, the three major networks and had them compete in various athletic events so as to answer the burning question of whether Scott Baio or Robert Conrad was the faster swimmer. It was hosted by Howard Cosell, in what seemed to be an attempt to give it a real sports patina. The athletic competitions were generally awkward, not least because some involved Gabe Kaplan in a tank top, but also because most of the celebrities were not actual athletes. Meaning that it was kind of like watching your local accounting firm put on a Broadway style production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. People who are good at one thing are not necessarily good at something else and watching them attempt an activity at which they have no skill, can be a little painful. Which, of course, brings us to stewardship season where you get to watch clergy explain the nature of finance, thinking that if they use the word invest, they have suddenly become J.P. Morgan. So here is the deal I will make with you, I will only talk about stewardship for one Sunday if you fill out and return your pledge cards. If not, I will go full prosperity gospel, start wearing a white suit and telling you why you need to “invest” in a helicopter for me so I can do the Lord’s work. So, let’s begin.

First off, I have to say that today’s readings are not terribly helpful regarding stewardship, at least not in terms of making you feel guilty about not giving, so I am going to have to stretch things a bit. To start the stretching let’s look at what St. Paul has to say in 1st Thessalonians. Here we read, “So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.” This quote comes inside a larger discussion about the day of the Lord. And if you are curious “Day of the Lord” is the nice way of saying God’s final judgement. So, when Paul is exhorting his readers to not fall asleep, he is telling them to always be about the things of God. They are not to put off getting right with God but are rather to do it right now and should keep doing it. In other words, following God is not something you mark on your calendar for some time down the road. In practicality, what this means is that the way we live today, tomorrow or six years from now should be consistent with what is means to be a Christian. And now for the big stretch. In the context of stewardship what we talk about today should not simply be a once yearly thing which somehow makes us good Christians but is rather a consistent part of what makes for a good life. Giving to the church is not just throwing something in the plate hoping I will shut up about it until next year but rather should be part of our walk of faith. It should be a response to what God has so freely given to us. Since we are created in the image of God giving freely should be part of our nature. And to go back to St. Paul we should not fall asleep but continually strive to make giving a part of our nature.

Stewardship broadly defined is what we do with all the gifts that God has given us. Do we use them in the service of God’s kingdom or the service of someone else’s kingdom? But let me be a little more specific. During what we call the season of stewardship we tend to just focus on money because we need to put together a budget. I know that is not glamorous but if you have ever tried paying your electric bill by offering WE energies a heartfelt haiku you know that money is often necessary. And regardless of which Bible translation you read the word money shows up quite a bit. According to a search I did on the New Revised Standard translation it shows up 183 times. And that is just the specific word money and does not include other words like wealth and filthy lucre. Many times, when the word money is mentioned, there is not a value judgement, rather just a statement of fact like in 1st Kings where we read, “Give me your vineyard for money.” Sometimes there is advice in how to get money like in Proverbs where we read, “Wealth hastily gained will dwindle, but those who gather little by little will increase it.” And there are still other times where there is a warning not about having money, but about loving money, like in Hebrews where we read, “Keep your lives free from the love of money.” And then there is the adage from Jesus that what we do with our money reflects who we are as a person. He says, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” And this description is probably the most germane to today’s conversation.

The Prussian General and military theorist Carl von Clausewitz famously said, “War is the continuation of politics by other means.” Adopting that adage to money and using the paradigm Jesus gives us, we could say that money is the extension of our will by other means. We use money to shape the world in the way we would like it to be shaped. Whether it is getting some new curtains for the living room or sending a kid to college, money is used to mold our lives and the lives of others in ways that accord with our desires. I mean I do not go to a restaurant and order food that I don’t like rather I order food that adheres to what I like. And so, when we talk about giving money to the church it is not just a way to give freely of what God has given us but is also a way to shape the world in ways that we and hopefully God approve and agree with.

People like to complain about the decline of civilization and the loss of religion in greater society and then leave it at that. But there is something that can be done. We can give money to an institution that stands athwart all of that. An institution like St. John Chrysostom is not, to quote Ephesians “tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.” This place stands firm as a reminder of all that is true and noble. Certainly, we do not do it perfectly, but we are different than not just much of society but of much of the current church. We believe like the author of Hebrews says that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.” And as a result, we seek to carry that message forward not by adopting Jesus to the culture but by holding up Jesus to the culture so it may see where it should be going. If you are concerned about the world and where it is headed, there is something that can be done. The world is not going to be changed by sitting around and complaining but will happen in places like this and thousands like it where people willfully submit their will to the will of God and seek to live lives in accordance with His calling. We talk about giving our treasure to the Church, but this is so that we can bring the Church’s treasure to the world. The treasure that was given her when Jesus told Peter, “On this rock I will build my church and the powers of death will not prevail against it.” I tend to be a low drama kind of guy, but the world is not in a nice spiritual place right now, it is a place enthralled by death and desperately needs the church. By giving to St. John Chrysostom, we are announcing that we choose not death but the life that Jesus promised in his resurrection and ascension so that we may be God’s own this day and forevermore.