Today is Christ the King Sunday which should not to be confused with Christ the King Lutheran Church which is just down the street across from the chiropractor. Christ the King Sunday is a fairly new day on the church calendar and if you would like a little history here it is: The day was officially put on the church calendar in 1925 by Pope Pius XI. 1925 was also the year that Mel Torme (aka The Velvet Fog) was born, but I don’t think that the two events are related. Part of Pope Pius’ impetus for codifying Christ the King had to do with the so-called Roman Question where the Popes lost control over traditional lands to the Italian state. So, in some ways the commeration was a line in the sand about who was really king of all. Various Protestant denominations have since borrowed the day including the Lutherans, Methodists and us. But putting aside the day’s history and whatever your views may be in regards to Papal real estate, I kind of like this day and what it has become. Since the question of Papal land claims is not much with us anymore, Christ the King has become in many ways a housekeeping day where we put things in order before moving into the Season of Advent. What I mean by this is that if you think in terms of the Church Calendar, you notice that today is the last day of the year. The calendar starts over next week on Advent I when we begin to prepare for the coming of Jesus. The calendar then moves us to the birth of Jesus, which is followed in short order by his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. After that we go into the exciting season known as regular time where we generally read about the stuff that happened in life of Jesus between Christmas and Easter. Which brings us to the housekeeping. The end of the story for Christians is that at some future point Christ will come again and rule over all, like a king. The story that we started on Advent I ends today with the final reality where all is under the control and kingship of Jesus Christ. And as I said earlier today works largely because it tidies things up and as my wife will tell you there are few things greater that we can do on this earth than tidy things up. Which brings us to another thing that needs a little tidying up and that is stewardship (how’s that for a transition?). You should have all gotten your letter by now along with the little pledge card. If you have not, please let me know, I have lots of extras.

Like Christ the King Sunday, stewardship season does not create a reality, rather it points out something that was there all along. In other words, it is not that Christ would cease to be King if we did not have this Sunday. Similarly, stewardship season does not create stewardship rather it is a reality that should be there all along. Stewardship is our reaction to the gifts that God has given us. We give because God first gave. And so, the reason we have a specific season dedicated to stewardship is not so much to create something as to tidy it up. Because the reality of the world is it takes financial resources to do things. If you don’t believe me next time you are at the grocery store, ask the checkout person if instead of paying with cash you can instead pay by singing a rousing rendition of “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair” from Rodger and Hammerstein’s *South Pacific*. Now before I go on, I realize that it is somewhat popular these days to talk of stewardship in terms of time, talent and treasure. And I do not disagree with this assessment but to be slightly indelicate that is not really what this particular season is about. I am grateful for everything that people here at St. John Chrysostom give but this season is about something very temporal and mundane and that temporal and mundane thing is we need to know how much money is coming in so we can make a budget. It may not sound very spiritual but that does not make it any less of a component of our spiritual lives.

Let me give you an example. Think for a moment about raising children. Some of what we do is very high minded like instilling then with good moral values that help them navigate the changes and chances of this mortal life but some of raising children is about remembering to pack their lunch. And as Frank Sinatra reminds us, “You can’t have one without the other.” So, let’s not poo-poo this rather pedestrian job of filling out a pledge card. For just like packing your children’s lunch it is a component of who we are and what we deem important. Here is what I mean by that. When we pack our kids a lunch there are certain logistical considerations – we had to remember the fruit snack, make sure there was some sort of protein and something to drink. But there was a larger understanding that governed all of this. By this act we are telling our children that we value them, that we want to take care of them and yes that we were good stewards of what God had given us. We do not want them to starve but rather want them to thrive and as any parent knows kids need food, sometimes quite a bit of it. And like it or not the church needs money to thrive.

Here is a dumb thought experiment: Let’s say our furnace here in the church went out and it was thirty-five degrees in here how many of you would have a joyous and wonderful worship experience? In fact, how many of you would even come? We are not gnostic. We do not believe that the physical and spiritual can be separated rather we believe that they are parts of a unified whole. And for this place to be healthy it has to be healthy both physically and spiritually. And for the physical part to be healthy this requires money. Money is needed not just for the buildings and grounds but also so we can have an excellent organist, a fabulous parish secretary who actually understands accounting and a priest who shows up most of the time. Just like a bird cannot fly with one wing a church needs to be financially sound in order to be spiritually sound. It may not sound romantic but it is reality. I don’t want to go too far down a rabbit trail but money is one of the chief ways we say what is important in our lives. Jesus says where your treasure is there your heart will be also. And so, the question becomes if someone audited our finances would there be any way in which to discern that we were a Christian? Jesus understood our finances as an extension of who we are as people.

And if you want a little closing pep talk here it is. The Covid pandemic has decimated churches. According to a recent Wall Street Journal article, “In-person church attendance is roughly 30% to 50% lower than it was before the pandemic…. [and] tens of thousands of churches are at risk of closing because of membership declines.” Various groups, including many in our diocese, have tried to put some lipstick on this pig and say that we are simply doing church differently now. Which to me is kind of like saying that the British were doing the American Colonies differently after Yorktown. But here is the good news. We are not doing things differently. We are gathering in the same way Christ commanded us to do. Our numbers are within striking distance of where they were before Covid. We have new members, we have a new baby and another one on the way. We have energy and excitement. We are getting new windows in the Parish Hall and our driveway no longer looks like the streets of Berlin after the Bolsheviks came through. We are growing in our love and service of God. Committing financial resources to St. John Chrysostom is like betting on a winning horse. It is saying that we want to be a piece of this wonderful and vibrant corner of Christ’s one true catholic and apostolic church so that we may live under the Kingship of Christ this day and forevermore.