Well, it would appear that we have begun our Stewardship campaign at St. Andrew’s. We have this dynamic puzzle grid to fill with the pieces we received in the mail for adults and children alike. We have received several mailings these past two weeks notifying us of things to come, and raising our awareness of what Stewardship means here at St. Andrew’s. And, what a fabulous and fun way to start it. I cannot tell you how wonderful it is to work with Mother Barbara and the Committee for this Stewardship campaign. My sermon on community a month ago found its source in the depth of discussion in the Committee about how to make St. Andrew’s a better community. And, we are blessed beyond measure to have someone as gifted in raising our awareness of Stewardship as Mother Barbara is. We have had too much fun working with a graphic designer who took our ideas and created a puzzle for us to solve together, as well as pledge cards that give us the option to pledge our time and/or treasure. And, as you found out reading the Newsletter, the graphic design work was done for free.

Now, maybe some of you are a little skittish about the concept of Stewardship, finding it distasteful to juxtapose talk of money with talk of God. Other reactions to Stewardship may be more extreme – you may avoid it like the plague. However, I would like to try to convince you that Stewardship is not only *not* distasteful juxtaposed to God, but has everything to do with God. Stewardship means more than giving to the Church, although the bottom line *is* that’s what is being asked, but what does Church mean to you? In my last sermon I asked what your commitment to Church is. It was a warm-up question for this sermon. Stewardship’s bottom line is not where your treasure is but where your heart is. What is the status of your love for God? How much do we buy-in to our relationship with God? Answering these questions for ourselves has everything to do with what we are willing to do for God’s church. What’s in your wallet is not the cornerstone of stewardship, but being in a loving relationship with God is.

Now Matthew’s Jesus in today’s Gospel reading tells us that *everything* ‘hangs on’ how we love God. Jesus took the Great Commandment of the ancient Israelites, the Shema, and ‘kicked it up a notch’. The Shema goes: ‘you shall love the Lord your god with all you heart, and with all you soul and with all your might’. Jesus or Matthew changed the word ‘might’ to ‘mind’ which was another way of saying heart (New Jerusalem Bible Commentary). If we love God with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind, I think Jesus was conveying that we are living into a relationship with God that God wants from us. It’s a tall order to love God with all of one’s being all the time, and we might not feel we can fill this order. So we tailor our love for God to how we feel. Sometimes we can give God *some* of the love God wants; maybe some soul and a lot of mind; or, a lot of heart, and throw in a little soul and some mind ... but to give God all three all the time may be beyond what we think we can give. And, so we tell ourselves, after all, we’re human and cannot attain the level of love that God can attain. But, God is not asking us to love God as God loves us because God does not need a heart, soul or mind to love us. God is love, and God’s love forms the spiritual center of our beings from which we love God, and are in a relationship of love with God as imperfect as that might be. And, in this relationship of love with God we find the complete and utter understanding of how we love each other, the second part of Jesus’ new and improved Great Commandment. ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ So, Jesus insists that not only do we have to love God well all the time, we’ve got to love our neighbor, too! For loving God and loving our neighbors is how we form the God-centered community which is God’s Church. Our practice of love for God and for our neighbor is our stewardship of God’s Church.

Now you may begin to see the relationship between loving God and our neighbor and being good stewards of God’s Church. If we think our relationship with loving God isn’t as good as God wants it to be, we may think it doesn’t matter whether we are good stewards of God’s Church, and so give little or nothing to it. If we’re down on ourselves because we haven’t loved our neighbors nearly as well as we have loved ourselves, this attitude of shame or guilt may be reflected in the kind of stewards we have been of God’s Church. Our hearts truly do guide where our treasures are, don’t they? When we give God whose love is the spiritual center of our being, all our heart and all our soul and all our mind, we are modeling the giving of our Stewardship to God’s Church.

I have to tell you that my very first ‘unofficial’ sermon was on stewardship. I was head of the Stewardship Committee at the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, and part of that duty was to give the first Stewardship talk of the season. I was scared to death as I walked up to the lectern, because I could feel the Holy Spirit use my heart, my mind and my soul to convince the people of St. Thomas to be good stewards of the Church. Then, as now, my sermon was about our relationship to God who gives so much more to us. I understand so much better now that when we live into the love God shows us, we find it easier to give of our love for God’s Church. And, conversely, when we find it difficult to live a life of love in God, we find that giving to God’s Church isn’t easy.

But this doesn’t mean we should give up on ourselves, and not give at all. There’s a popular book on Anglican/Episcopal theology and doctrine titled *Praying Shapes Believing* in which the author instructs that as we practice the prayers and worship of our Church, we come to believe more deeply in God. I think this concept can be applied to giving. By giving ourselves to God’s Church through our treasure, time or talent we are shaping our belief in the model of the Great Commandment Jesus gave us. God wants us to give God love, and Jesus wants us to give it to our neighbor, too. These commandments are the center of our believing community, our giving community, and our loving community. May our giving be shaped by our loving.