

COLUMN

No one likes paying taxes, even though we enjoy many of the benefits they bring. Locally, they enable us to have police protection, fire and rescue services and a host of other benefits.

Without a doubt nationally an enormous amount is squandered on cumbersome bureaucracy and worthless programs. Even so, I am happy to think some of what I put in goes towards such noble things as the maintenance of national parks, the preservation of historical sites, keeping our military strong and helping people who are truly in need.

Paying taxes may not top anyone's lists of favourite tasks, but the task I find more irksome still is the paperwork. About this time each year my desk is covered with little stacks of receipts and other items which I must go through and organize before I can turn the whole mess over to my accountant.

Some years ago I remember returning to my office and finding a young member of our church, a boy aged two and half, 'helping' me. Sitting in my chair, he was rearraigning items in my little piles. In the end, though. no harm was done, and I think I even got a refund that year!

For a clergyman, a part of this annual ordeal is justifying his automobile allowance. For me, this means going through my planning diary for the previous year and transferring information I have recorded there onto milage forms for my accountant. Going about that task this year was a sobering experience.

At the beginning of last year, I had written in the blocks all the things I was planning to do: meetings, conferences, special services, musical concerts, a study holiday in Oxford, England, to name a few. Most never happened. A line was drawn through virtually everyone. A certain pandemic intervened.

As I looked down at my 2020 calendar, two passages from the Bible shouted back at me. The first from the Old Testament saying: "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1). The second from the New Testament, "Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year . . . For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4:13,14).

Neither statement, condemns proper planning, but they do remind us Who is in charge and that each day is gift. The entries on my calendar were tentative

at best. Robert Burns perhaps said it best: “The best laid plans of mice and men often go array.”

Tax preparation may not be our favourite endeavour, but if it teaches us to trust God more, ourselves less and to put all our tomorrows in His hand, it is time well spent. “Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth.”

ALMIGHTY God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; Keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect for the Second Sunday in Lent, The Book of Common Prayer).

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