

TALK ONE: Giving Puts a Smile on your Face

Opening Illustration:

The strongman at a circus sideshow demonstrated his power before a large audience. Towards the end, he squeezed the juice from a lemon between his hands. He then said to the audience, "I will offer £100 to anyone in the audience who can squeeze another drop from this lemon. A thin scholarly looking woman came forward, picked up the lemon, strained hard and managed to get a drop. The strongman was amazed. He paid the woman and said, "I've been doing this act for sixteen years, and tonight is the first time I've had to pay out. What is the secret of your strength?" "Practice," the woman answered. "I was a church treasurer for thirty-two years!"

Sometimes it might feel like our needs for money require us to try and squeeze more money out of those who already support the church. But that shouldn't be the case, and if we have a right view of generosity, we can be confident in our giving. This week and for the next two weeks we are focusing in on how generosity can enable mission, and in giving to meet the needs of the church and mission, we are also giving back to God.

The title of this series is Giving Puts a Smile on Your Face (Even in Yorkshire) It come from the passage in 2 Corinthians which says,

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Cor 9:7)

Hopefully over the next 3 weeks we'll get to understand just what giving is and why we do it. And that it isn't an activity that's selfish, mean or difficult but that it is just a part of worship as taking communion, singing hymns, praying and reading the Bible. Like many things in the bible, when you take a look at the original language of a word we find a little more revealed and the word 'Cheerful' in 2 Corinthians 9 has more of a sense of it being HILARIOUS

OF YOUR OWN DO WE GIVE YOU

The passage from 1 Chronicles 29 contains familiar words, which are often used at the offertory, but the context may be less familiar.

This passage is set towards the end of David's reign. God had told David that because he had been a warrior who had spilt blood (1 Chron 28:3), he would not be allowed to build the temple. Solomon his son would have that privilege. Concerned about his youthful age, and lack of experience; David sets about preparing the materials needed for the building of the temple.

In the passage we heard this morning, we hear what David said to a national assembly he had called together, and how he challenged the people to give generously to the building of the temple. This is an inspiring story of God's people giving generously to God's work.

But it starts with David himself – who gives both from the wealth of his office (1 Chron 29:1,2) –

Then King David said to the whole assembly: “My son Solomon, the one whom God has chosen, is young and inexperienced. The task is great, because this palatial structure is not for man but for the LORD God. ² With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God—gold for the gold work, silver for the silver, bronze for the bronze, iron for the iron and wood for the wood, as well as onyx for the settings, turquoise,^[u] stones of various colors, and all kinds of fine stone and marble—all of these in large quantities.

, and also from his own personal funds (1 Chron 29:3).

³ Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple

He is unwilling to ask others to give until he has given himself.

David is giving funds for the temple – for the building of the church, but he is clear that his gift is for the worship and the glory of God. In verse 1 David said to the whole assembly: “The task is great, because this palatial structure is not for man but for the Lord God.” Sometimes it’s easy to lose sight of the fact that our giving is for God - whichever channel it might be directed through.

But that which we give to God, comes from God. In verse 14, David says

“But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.” It’s such an important point he reiterates it two verses later : “O LORD our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you.”

And here is our first cycle of generosity. All that we have is from a generous God, and so, all that we give back to God is his in the first place. He has taken what is his, and blessed us, and placed it into our care, and we take it and offer it back to him, as we give to his work.”

GOD OWNS EVERYTHING

But what does it mean that God owns everything - as the Simpsons’ Grace says, “Dear God, we paid for all this stuff ourselves, so thanks for nothing” - Grace on ‘The Simpsons’

God’s ownership is different from human ownership - it is a generous, shared ownership, that entrusts us as stewards, taking care of that which is entrusted to us.

Human ownership is possessive and exclusive - if I own something, you don’t. It’s mine, and I have the rights on it.

Right from the start, in the Genesis account of creation, God gives to man ‘stewardship’ of creation - the responsibility to care for it, to till the

ground, to 'rule' over the earth. Yet that doesn't make it our earth, for God retains his ownership.

God's ownership is a generous, shared ownership - 'it's Mine, and it's yours; to have and to enjoy, with the freedom to do with it what you think best,' And we have a responsibility for what we have, parable of the Talents. Jesus seems to be saying that one day we'll have to make account for that. (That story is in Matthew 25)

And Psalm 24:1 says The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;

WHEN WE GIVE TO OTHERS WE GIVE TO GOD

Our Gospel reading is challenging in all sorts of ways. Not least it encourages our generosity to take different forms - and Jesus also uses the parable to teach the surprising truth that as we give to others, we are giving to Christ.

Teaching Point:

v40: "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

So how does this work out in practical terms for you and for me?

Proportional giving. Tithe and the Church of England teaching on it i.e 5% + 5% = 10%

Planning our giving. Christian Giving is not about a whim, how inspired we feel, how guilty we feel or what is left over after we've paid for everything else.

Prayerful Giving It is about thanking God for all the wonderful gifts he has given to us and then in response to that seeking before God to understand how much he wants us to give to his work, every week and then making sure it happens. If we want to give more at some particular time we can do but let's work out our basic giving before God.

Practical Giving Standing orders and Gift Aid.

So what are the benefits to us, the church family?

We, the church, have a regular income.

We as individuals know that we've thought it out with God and it doesn't rely on what money we've got in our purses, how we felt on the day or even, if we were in church that day.

Other Supporting Passages, Quotes and Illustrations:

“Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can,

At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can.”

John Wesley

E INTRODUCING THE REFLECTIONS LEAFLET

When you leave church this morning, you will be given one of these leaflets (hold one up). This leaflet contains five short passages and reflections that we're encouraged to use this week to reflect on God's generosity to us, and that how, our giving enables mission and ministry to happen.

F CONCLUSION

So all that we have – and all that we are – come from God.