**The Two Rivers Mission Community**

**Generosity – sermon 2**

**Giving generously to your local church**

*Epistle reading: 2 Corinthians 8.1-15*

*Gospel reading: Matthew 6.25-34*

Last week we kicked off a short sermon series looking at generosity and especially being generous with our money. We thought about how God is a generous God, and how we can bring joy to God’s heart, bless others, and be blessed ourselves by following his example.

This week we wanted to look specifically at giving generously to our local church, before next week we look at giving generously to God’s work more widely.

In the Old Testament, when God gave instructions to his people through Moses about how they were supposed to live, God told his people to give 10% of their income to the Tabernacle and, once it was built, the Temple (Leviticus 27.30; Numbers 18:21-24).

The money the people gave was to support the worship of God and the ministry of the priests.

As we move to the New Testament, we see the first Christians selling possessions and laying the proceeds at the feet of the Apostles (acts 4.34-47)

Surely, we are supposed to see in both these Old Testament commands and the practice of the early church an example to follow.

In the letters Paul wrote, we see more about giving to missionary activity and support of fellow Christians in need than funding the local church, but Paul writes clearly in several places that those who work for the Gospel can expect to receive financial support (e.g. 1 Timothy 5.15).

I think, when it comes to giving to church, a difficult thing for us in the Church of England is that we have lots of historic assets.

In the past, we have relied on these assets to fund our buildings and our clergy.

Other denominations have known that if you want a building you have to pay to build it and you have to pay to maintain it.

If you want a minister you have to pay his wages.

There’s no expectation that someone else will do it for you.

Now in the Church of England local churches are being asked to fund more and more of the cost of their ministry…and often local churches don’t like it!

But the reality is that keeping a local church running and ministering to its community costs money, and whilst we might be fortunate to receive support from the local community to maintain our buildings, and the cost of clergy is subsidised by historic assets, on the whole it’s up to the local Christians to find the money to support the local church.

So, how should we go about giving to our local church?

St Paul, in the 8th and 9th chapters of his second letter to the Corinthians gives us some helpful advice:

1. Give in response to God’s love.
2 Corinthians 8.9: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

We have received so much from God; not only is all that we own a gift from God, but our lives themselves, and the new life we have as children of God and inheritors of eternal life.

1. Give generously
2 Corinthians 9.6: “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously”.

Its often said that God is no man’s debtor. You can’t out give God.

As we give generously to God, God will give generously to us… not financially maybe, although he might…

I think God often gives more to people he knows will use what he gives, rather than squirrel it away for a rainy day…

1. Give joyfully
2 Corinthians 9.7: “God loves a cheerful giver”

Enough said!

1. Give in a planned way.

2 Corinthians 9.7 again: “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion”.

Its good to have a bit of money set aside to respond to an urgent appeal, but giving to church is much best done through prayerful thought and then active commitment.

For me, setting up a direct debit means I give what I have planned each month without having to make sure I have enough cash in my wallet on a Sunday morning and finding its empty!

The parish giving scheme is an excellent way of planning giving.

And it thrills a treasurer’s heart and helps them to budget if they know how much is coming in each month.

1. Give out of what you have and not what you don’t.

2 Corinthians 8.12: “For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.”

Sometimes we’re called to give till it hurts.

But generally, our giving should be a reflection of how God has blessed us.

If God has given us much, we can give much.

If we are getting by on very little, then God expects less of us… and indeed we might actually be the recipient of other peoples’ generosity.

So, if God pricks our conscience and we know that we are not giving as generously as we could, lets give more generously… and find joy in doing so.

But let’s not compare ourselves to others and feel bad or guilty. What we give is between us and God. Let’s do what we can, and not feel bad about what we can’t.

On a practical note, sometimes people ask, should Christians tithe – give 10% of their income to church, as the Israelites in the Old Testament gave 10% to the Temple?

My response to that is, we are no longer living under the law of the Old Testament, but under the grace of the New.

We do not *have* to give 10% of our income to God.

But it does seem to me that if we have experienced God’s grace in Jesus then why would we give less than the people of the Old Testament who hadn’t?

So, perhaps 10% is a good starting place for our giving?

Recognising that everything we have is God’s anyway – we don’t own anything really… we just hold in on trust.

I said last week that we aren’t running this sermon series because we are broke and need people to give more to make ends meet.

But let me just try something out on you…

Around 130 people claim to be members of our mission community churches and attend church at least once per month.

Let’s assume that we are all on half of the average UK wage – so about £17,500 per year.

And let’s suppose we all tithed 10% of that income to church.

Our benefice would have an income of around a quarter of million pounds per year, before taking into account other sources of income.

We could do a lot with that, couldn’t we?

Maybe this year we could put in a few toilets and tea stations and next year fix a roof or two?

Maybe we could employ a children’s and youth worker to help us reach out to young people?

Maybe we could… well, what would you spend the money on to build God’s kingdom?

In our gospel reading this morning Jesus said not to worry about food and drink… the necessities of life… but to seek first his kingdom.

We are called to earn a living to provide for ourselves and our families

But that’s not supposed to be the “be all and end all” of the Christian life.

Instead, we are to make knowing Jesus and becoming like him our primary goal.

We are to do all that we can bring glory to Jesus and build his kingdom.

We are to invest our time and talents and money in something that will last, not in things which moth and rust destroy.

So, shall we?

**Prayer**

Father God,

Your Son, Jesus, asked what good it is for a man to gain the world, but lose his soul?

Please help us to seek your kingdom above all things, trusting that you will look after us.

So may we generously give our time, our abilities and our money in things of eternal value.

In Jesus name,

Amen.