**The Two Rivers Mission Community**

**Generosity – sermon 3**

**Giving generously to God’s mission**

*Epistle reading: James 2.1-17*

*Gospel reading: Matthew 28.16-20*

So, we now come to the third and final sermon in our mini-series looking at generosity.

We’ve thought about how we might give generously to our local church and how this might bring joy to God’s heart, blessing to others and indeed a blessing to ourselves.

Today we want to look at giving to God’s mission more widely.

It’s said that the danger of parish ministry is that it can get very parochial! We can become so focused on what we are doing locally, that we lose sight of the bigger picture.

I think this is especially a danger in the Church of England at the moment. Many churches are struggling to maintain buildings, raise finances, encourage people to come along and get involved, especially younger people.

Everyone’s effort go into keeping the show on the road…

And anything else is seen as a luxury at best and a distraction at worst.

But if that is the case for us, we aren’t the first people to fall into the trap.

Just before Jesus ascended to heaven, he gave his disciples the command to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28.19)

And he promised them the Holy Spirit, so that they could be his witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, *and to the ends of the earth*.” (Acts 1.8)

As the psalmist said, “The earth is the lord’s and everything in it” (Psalm 24.1)

And here, as he gave his disciples their final instructions, Jesus made it clear that the Gospel needed to be taken out beyond the territory with which they were familiar to the far corners of the globe.

So what did they do?

Well, largely stay put…

It took persecution in Jerusalem to get the church moving.

After the stoning of Stephen, the church scattered (Acts 8.1).… and those early Christians took the good news of Jesus with them as they went

As Christians we are primarily called to worship and minister and witness in the place where God has put us.

If we live in newton Tracey, its Newton Tracey. If we live in Beaford, its Beaford.

But its not *only* in Newton Tracey, or in Beaford.

We are part of a global missionary movement, tasked with taking the good news of Jesus to all people, with planting churches in every community, with building God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

We might be small, but we are nonetheless part of something very, very big.

And so, we will want to be play our part in this very, very big, mission of God.

And *part* of that will be to give generously to that mission.

We can do that as individuals,

And we can do so as churches.

Many churches make it a policy that they will tithe, give 10%, of their normal (unrestricted) income to God’s mission outside their parish.

Now, doing that might create some tensions in some communities. People think they are giving to their local church and will stop doing so if they think the church is giving some of that money away to other things.

It may be wise to hold special collections for different projects,

Or fundraise for a project where its very clear where the money is going.

In other parishes it won’t be a problem at all.

But the reality is that many Christian missionary organisations or charities can’t raise money from anything other than Christian sources.

So many funders expressly prohibit the spending of money on anything involving sharing faith.

If the worldwide church is going to fulfil her God given mission to share the gospel in all places, then the richer churches of the West surely need to support those willing to take the gospel into the hard and unreached countries of this world.

If the worldwide church is going to honour and support its persecuted members, then the richer churches of the West surely need to put some money into providing bibles and training and advocacy for Christians working in those places were to even be a Christian is punishable with imprisonment, torture and even death.

If the worldwide church is going to help the poor and needy in the name of Jesus, then those with the money to provide teachers and doctors and agricultural scientists and water purification equipment.

Do we really believe that the Gospel is good news for everyone and everyone should have the opportunity to find love and forgiveness and hope and a future in the loving arms of Jesus?

Do we really believe that all Christians are one in the body of Christ?

Do we really believe that we have a responsibility to care for one another and support one another?

Do we really believe that the church has a special mission to care for those in need?

If we do, then we won’t be able to just sit on the sidelines and wish our brothers and sisters well,

We’ll want to be informed, to pray, to give and do whatever we can… generously… as God has been generous to us.

James 1.14-17 says: What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?

He's got a point!

So, might we, as churches in the Two Rivers Mission Community, make a commitment to prayerfully think about what we can do to support the word-wide church to fulfil the worldwide mission of God?

Perhaps we might pick a project to support locally in Devon, one nationally in the UK and something oversees.

Perhaps we might get informed.

Pray.

And give generously.

Often its possible to build real relationships with those who are working for the Gospel, with people who would so value not just a hastily written cheque, but a relationship in which information is shared and prayers offered as well as money generously given.

In Philippians 4, Paul thanks the Philippians for their financial support, but he also thanks them for sharing in his troubles…. For taking an active concern in his sufferings for the gospel.

This is the Christian way.

I wanted to end with a thought from a book called The Hole in the Gospel.

The contention of the writer is that if every Christian in America gave 10% of their annual income to their church, and each church in turn dedicated 1% of its annual income to irradicating world poverty, the church in America could solve the problem of world hunger, lack of access to education and medicine in just a few years.

How might that warm the heart of God?

How might that speak to a watching world about what God is like and his church is like?

Here in the Two Rivers we can’t do everything.

But we can do something…

So shall we?

**Prayer**

Father God,

Save us from thinking too small of you,

Too small of your love for the world you have made,

Or too small of the mission you have given to your people.

Help us, to play our part in your mission to your world,

To share the gospel, to plant and grow churches, to build your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Help us to not only be informed, to pray, to advocate, to love and serve, but also to generously give.

For your glory’s sake,

Amen