**Two Rivers Mission Community**

**Values 4: Generosity**

**Deuteronomy 15.7-15 2 Corinthians 8.1-5**

So, today we come to week four of our five-part series looking at our values; the character traits we hope to grow within the life of our churches.

And today we come to the topic of generosity.

Now I can guess what you’re thinking… this is going to be a sermon about money and giving to church.

Well, I’d hate to disappoint you, so I’ll start with that, but giving to church is really just a tiny part, one aspect, of what I want to talk about today.

So, let’s do the giving to church bit first to get it out the way and then move on other things…

I’m going to lay my cards on the table.

Unless there’s a really good reason, I think every Christian (including clergy!) should be giving at least one tenth of their normal income to church.

In the Old Testament, the Law was very clear that God’s people were required to give 10% of their income to the Temple, and this tithe was then used to support the worship of God and the care for the poor.

The New Testament there is no explicit figure or proportion mandated for what Christians should give to the Church, but its hard to imagine that those of us who have experienced so much more of God’s generosity in Jesus than the Israelites did in the Old Testament would want to respond by giving less.

On top of this we might give free will offerings when we simply want to bless God and others. We can give thank offerings when God has particularly blessed us. We can give to particular needs, like the Israelites did towards the building of the tabernacle (Exodus 25) or towards the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem after return from the exile (Ezra 2.68).

A Christian principle is that those who have more should give more (*of him to whom much has been given, much is expected,* Luke 12.48).

Now, I know there are reasons why it might be hard of not impossible to give to the Church in this way.

Our circumstances might be difficult.

We might be married to a non-Christian who can’t be expected to give as we do.

But I’m going to be straight down the line with you about this…

Giving is a way of showing our love for God and others.

It’s a way of investing in eternal things, even in people spending an eternity in heaven rather than hell.

God loves a cheerful giver.

And giving is good for us – it frees us from a love of money and enables us to share in God’s work.

Helen and I have always tithed since we were students – the first 10% of our income goes to God and then more to other causes as appropriate.

We have less money than we might otherwise..

But God has never let us go without,

God has proved that you can never outgive him.

I’d encourage you to give generously to God through the church and in other ways, because I want the best for you; and prayerful, regular, generous giving will help you grow as a follower of Jesus…

And it will of course help the work of your church.

I’m so proud of you all that you’ve managed to maintain your common fund payments to the Diocese, mission fund expenses and local church costs throughout the pandemic. Well done and thank you.

But just imagine what we could do if we all gave generously to the work of God through our churches…

There we go… there’s the giving to church bit done…

Now to the heart of this sermon… and it goes like this…

God is a generous God.

When we tackled the first of our values, the value of love, we said that God shows his love for us in giving… not his cash (although he does) but giving of himself…

“For God so loved the world that he *gave* his only son…”

When we talk then about building a culture of generosity as Christians, and in our churches, this is what we are talking about – that we give of ourselves for others.

I wonder if you’ve come across the “YouVersion” bible app?

It’s been downloaded 268 times onto phones or other devices. It enables you to read the bible for free and follow bible reading plans… again for free.

The app was developed by Life Church in American led by Craig Groeschel.

And they give it away for free.

I heard Craig Groeschel speak at a leadership conference a couple of years ago and remember being struck by him saying that ‘from the first days we resolved that if it wasn’t nailed down, we’d give it away’.

Now, you may say ‘Oh well, I’m sure that’s easy for his church… they’re a large, well off church in America… they haven’t got the problems we have.”

But they started with a handful of people in a garage and have grown exponentially since.

Surely that’s in part because God has seen that the more he gives them, the more they give away.

He can trust them as a church not to hoard for a rainy day. They trust that God will provide as they have need and they just keep on giving.

Closer to home I’d mention ‘Care for the Family’, a wonderful Christian charity that supports family life, especially families facing hardships such as breakdown, bereavement and poverty.

They charge for their books and resources… but always say that if you can’t afford them, they’ll give them to you for free…

Their primary concern is to get the help to those who need it… and God provides.

Now, in case you think I’m just talking about money, please hear me, “I’M NOT”.

I’m talking about a generosity of spirit that says, I will do whatever I can to bless others in Jesus’ name.

Its such a shame that so often churches have become known in their communities for asking for money.

It gives the impression to those outside that God is poor and impotent and needs non-believers to help him out.

What if instead our churches became known as places of generosity; where people could come and experience the radical generosity of God?

I was so pleased that some of our churches managed to put on coffee mornings and other events for the community for free.

The message given was simply, “We care about this community and we want to bless you”… just a small thing, but speaking volumes.

Let me mention a couple of other ways in which we might show generosity.

The first is in offering hospitality. Opening our homes to others, or even just creating space for others to talk and experience relationship whilst out for a walk.

Hospitality doesn’t have to involve a posh meal. It can be offered over a cup of tea and a biscuit.

Its about having a heart for others and making room for them.

Hospitality is so often commended in the bible. It’s a requirement of anyone who is to be appointed a leader (1 Timothy 3.2).

In showing hospitality some people have even entertained angels! (Hebrews 13.2).

Another way I hope we can show generosity is by being generous of spirit.

The world can be very harsh. All some people have only ever known hard words and criticism.

Generosity of spirit means showing kindness and forbearance. Not pointing out peoples’ faults but praising their good points… even if its just that they are nice to their cat.

Generosity of Spirit means assuming the best of people rather than the worst.

Do you ever get an email and you read it and think, “urgh, that’s really unfair, unkind or harsh?”

We assume that the person emailing us is upset with us, cross with us, thinks we are stupid.

If we just take the time to pick up the phone and talk to them 9 times out 10 they aren’t. It’s just it’s hard to catch peoples’ tone and meaning in an email. We assume the worst.

And generosity of spirit means that even if the worst is true, we are kind enough to forgive those who hurt us and love them anyway.

Generosity enables people to try things, make mistakes, not be condemned.

Generosity means people can get things wrong and be forgiven and given the chance to have another go.

A church that is generous is a place where people aren’t always looking over their shoulder and fearing what they’ve done wrong, but a place where people are free to fly, knowing that others are there to support them and catch them if they fall.

One more way in which we might show generosity… and that’s towards other churches.

We all want our churches to do well, to grow, to flourish…

but generosity of spirit means we are just as happy when another church does well, grows and flourishes.

After all, we are all in the same business; children of the same heavenly Father and working to grow God’s kingdom.

When and where we can, lets bless the churches around us. When they thrive, we all thrive.

Let’s even bless the diocese of Exeter and the Church of England!

I’m sure I could give plenty of other examples of how we might show generosity.

You will be able to think of examples of your own.

But let me end by saying, very, very simply…

God is generous. We have all benefitted from his generosity.

Let’s do all we can to be like our heavenly Father – generous – giving of ourselves for others.