

## Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2021 – Stewardship & Giving

2 Corinthians 8:1-9, Mark 12:41-43

### Introduction:

- Have you ever received a gift that you knew you didn't deserve? How did you feel?
- Have you ever been given something which you knew meant the person giving it to you was going to miss out themselves? How did you feel?

The Easter story of Jesus' death and resurrection is one of divine generosity and grace. All that we receive through his death – forgiveness of sins, and his resurrection – new life with God, is utterly underserved.

- We haven't earned it ... *The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23)*
- It is instead offered to us as a sacrificial gift of love ... *This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10)*

This understanding of God's love and grace to us is the foundation upon which Paul bases his discussion about giving in 2 Corinthians 8-9:

*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 (2 Corinthians 8:9)*

### 1. Giving As A Response to God's Love:

So, our giving should be a response to the love and grace of God. God calls us all to give generously of our time, our gifts and talents, our homes and our concern for others. The well know Parable of the Good Samaritan is an example of giving; loving care as he tends the man's

injuries, time as he takes the man to safety and money as he offers to pay whatever is needed at the inn.

When we give to others we reflect God's amazing generosity to us, both through Jesus' death and resurrection but also through the blessings of creation. King David prayed these words on the day the temple was dedicated in Jerusalem:

*Who am I, and who are these 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 (1 Chronicles 19:14)*

## **2. Deliberate Giving:**

Our giving should be a deliberate response to God's love – an act of worship and discipleship. It should be planned, a priority rather than an afterthought at the end of the week.

*On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made (1 Corinthians 16:2)*

It should be proportionate, an intentional amount – or proportion of what you yourself receive in income. That was the OT model, a 10% tithe of crops and income was given to God. The exact amount doesn't matter but the principle of deliberately giving a set proportion of your income back to God is a good one. The CofE has for many years suggested 5% to support the ministry of your local church and 5% to support other charities. The amount is your decision!

## **3. Sacrificial Giving:**

The story of the Widow's offering from Mark 12 (the widow's mite as it is sometimes called) is an extreme example of sacrificial giving. We don't know the back story, but on this day all she has to live on is two small copper coins, and she chooses to give them both to God!

Jesus compares this to the gold and silver being deposited by other, richer people. She has given more, much more – she gave everything she had – truly generous, truly sacrificial giving.

Now – I’m not about to invite you to empty your bank accounts! But being willing to give more than just our spare change is an important principle which reflects the sacrifice that Jesus made for you and me when he gave up his life on the cross. He gave everything for you.

So Paul encourages the Corinthians to emulate the behaviour of the Macedonian Christians: *In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. (2 Corinthians 8:2-3)*

They were experiencing difficulty but they still gave proportionately and sacrificially.

#### **4. Joyful Giving:**

Parting with our money is something we don’t like to do – even when we are getting something in return. So being asked to give some away does not sound much like fun – unless you understand that your gift is helping to build the kingdom of God, allowing poverty and suffering to be alleviated and supporting others.

It is a sharing in the self-giving love of God towards his world and his people. If we understand that, then we should be glad that we can be a part of it ... as Paul said to the Corinthians

*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 Corinthians 9:7)*

## **Conclusion:**

Yes, I am asking you to consider your financial support for the work of your local church. Because at a practical level salaries and bills need to be paid, buildings need to be maintained and resources are needed to help share the love of Jesus in our community.

Our giving comes from our receiving of God's love and grace ... and our desire to respond to God in gratitude, and to share that grace with others.

- It should be a deliberate act of Christian discipleship ...
- It should be a sacrificial response to the loving sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross ...
- It should be a joyful participation in the work of God in his world ...

## **For Reflection & Discussion:**

Re read Mark 12:41-44

- What does this passage tell us about God & Jesus?
- What does this passage tell us about people?
- Which group would you be in – 'widow' or 'rich people'?

Re read 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

- What has Jesus done for you that make you rich? (ref v9)
- What should our response be?
- What does deliberate, sacrificial and joyful giving look like for you in your particular context today?

## **Prayer:**

Father God, we thank you for the love and grace which you have poured upon us through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

He became poor so that we might become rich.

Help us to share that love and grace with other – deliberately, sacrificially and joyfully. To give back to you what you first gave to us.

Amen.