

## November 6<sup>th</sup> Day of Giving- Stewardship

### 1 Chronicles 29:14-19

<sup>14</sup> "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.

<sup>15</sup> We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you. <sup>18</sup> O LORD, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep this desire in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you. <sup>19</sup> And give my son Solomon the wholehearted devotion to keep your commands, requirements and decrees and to do everything to build the palatial structure for which I have provided."

### Matthew 22:15-22

#### The Question about Paying Taxes

<sup>15</sup> Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. <sup>16</sup> So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. <sup>17</sup> Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' <sup>18</sup> But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? <sup>19</sup> Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. <sup>20</sup> Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' <sup>21</sup> They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' <sup>22</sup> When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

## Opening stories

A \$5 note met a \$50 note and said, 'Hey! Where have you been? I haven't seen you around here much.'

The \$50 note replied, 'I've been hanging out at the Bingo, done the Lotto a few times, had Chinese takeaways, gone to a couple of rugby matches and a concert or two, hanging out at the mall doing a bit of shopping, really getting into Trade me lately - a few holidays abroad, that kind of stuff. How about you?'

The \$5 note sighed and said, 'Oh, you know. Same old, same old - church, church, church.'

There were three children in the playground down at the local school bragging about their parents. The first one says, 'My dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, calls it a poem, and they give him 50 bucks.'

'That's nothing!', says another, 'My mum scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, calls it a song and they give her 100 bucks.'

'I've beaten you both!', the third child says. 'My dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, calls it a sermon and it takes several people to collect up all the money.'

Yours Oh Lord is the greatness and the power, and the glory and the majesty and the splendour. All that is in the heavens and the earth is yours and of your own we give you.

We say this as we bring our offerings to God in our services.

In the first letter of Paul to Timothy in chapter 9:6 we read:

Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and who ever sows generously will also reap generously. Each one should give what they have decided in their heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver.

## GENEROSITY

Scripture encourages us to be people who are generous. Generous in kindness, generous in mercy towards others, generous with our time and talents and with our resources.

I believe the beginning point for generosity-the way to cultivate generous hearts and minds and actions is to know first of all how generous God is to us. All that is in the heavens and the earth is Gods. And he has given us everything to enjoy.

If God were miserly what would this world look like?

Maybe one or two different varieties of flowers-perhaps red and yellow-no delicate hues of pink or blue or orange. Maybe one model of cat-plain grey and only brown dogs with pointy ears-no long haired pups or mottled coats. Perhaps one kind of landscape with nothing too lovely to take our mind of work. Everything smelling the same, and tasting bland.

But we know that is so not who God is. God is infinitely generous beyond measure. Look at the glory of the created world. My apple tree in the back yard is so laden with blossoms this year that if every apple grew it would fall over. Thank goodness for some windy days.

The incredible variety of colours and shapes and smells and tastes. The individual pattern of every snowflake, every human being unique in their looks and personality. God is infinitely generous in all he has done.

That is the beginning point - we need to understand and acknowledge that everything comes from God, God has been incredibly generous in giving us such a rich and wonderful place to live and that should create in us the same attitude of generosity in us.

If Generosity is the beginning point the next part of the equation is to understand that if everything in the whole created order is his- then he has placed us here to take good care of it, to be good stewards of all we have.

We need to start from the place-that all we have, all we have worked hard for, all we have been given, all that comes our way is in a sense just on loan. It comes from God and he has entrusted it to us to use wisely and well.

And we begin by offering back to God what we have been given.

Being good stewards of all God gives to us begins with our heart attitude.

Acknowledging that all we have comes from God, that God is generous towards us and all we have is his. It is from that place that we give back to him. Offering our first fruits to him.

What might that look like for us?

Putting God first.

God is our first love.

Our time is his, our talents are his, our resources are his.

We begin each new day acknowledging God-offering him our thanks and praise, our love - and ourselves to serve him. For taking time to be still in God's presence and from that place being open to helping someone, to looking after the resources he has given us, to working as if we are working for him.

And when we come to him to offer our first fruits-that is not just about money, first of all it about offering our worship. Our priority is to worship him, on a daily basis and as we gather on the Lord's day with God's people to offer our worship to him.

If we just shove God into the spaces we have left over we will find very quickly that there is not much room for him.

The same is true for the time we give- if we do everything in life to please ourselves first and then consider doing something for someone else we find very quickly that we begrudge doing things for others and want our time to ourselves.

It also works the same way with the skills and talents we have. If we only put them to use to gain things for ourselves we become selfish and unwilling to help others or use our gifts to encourage those around us in our work places, our families, our church and places of leisure.  
And it follows on that this principle applies to our money.

If we see our money as our own-we have worked for it and we can do with it what we want. We will look after ourselves first-our families and then maybe look beyond ourselves to others.

But God invites us to bring him our first fruits.

To make our offering to him first and then to use what else we have to provide for our own needs and the needs of others.

Our hearts attitude is the starting place. Attitude of loving God first with hearts full of gratitude for all he has given us - his generosity to us in all creation.

And from that place we decide what to bring.

The old testament sets up guidelines and principles for giving to God first and then providing for family, and for the poor. Their giving at the temple provided

for the priests, for the running of the temple, for those who needed support. In a sense Israel had its own social welfare system to make sure everyone was ok.

In the time of Christ Israel was still a nation but they were governed by the occupying Romans. And the Romans extracted high taxes over and above the tithes and offerings the people of God brought into the temple for the Priests and Levites to live by and distribute to the poor.

When asked about that Jesus answered - Give to God that which is God's and give to Caesar that which is Caesar's. Jesus affirmed we bring to God our first Fruits and we pay the taxes of the land.

Jesus also had some strong words for the religious leaders of the day who prided themselves in bringing a tenth of absolutely everything-their herbs and spices - to the letter of the law who were full of pride at their righteous keeping of the law, and yet ignoring the poor around them or making it difficult for those who society shunned to come to God.

Jesus also praised a widow who brought the smallest coin as an offering to God-small though this gift was it was all that she had- a much greater sacrifice than the gifts of the self-righteous leaders.

In the book of Acts after Jesus had returned to his father and the Holy Spirit poured out we see God's people responding with very real generosity to God and the people.

In Acts two: 42ff we see the people of God holding everything in common-selling their possessions and goods and giving to anyone in need-their priorities had turned upside down. A radical new social system was beginning. They still had to pay their taxes to Caesar and they were still meeting in the temple at that time so no doubt the Jews were taking their tithes to the temple.

As Gentiles came to faith and the church began to grow and spread out things began to change-it isn't clear whether tithes were still taken to the temple but we do see churches taking up collections for churches in other places where they were in dire need. We see people like Paul receiving gifts for his support at times and then we see him making tents to not be a financial burden on the people. All through this we see in scripture an encouragement to be content with what we have and to be generous.

1 Tim 6:6-10

But Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

17: tell those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of life that is truly life.

2 Cor 8:

and now brothers we want to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most 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—they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. ---see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

Each one should give what they have decided in their heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver.

In this parish we have been greatly blessed by God over many, many years. Faithful parishioners have given as they are able on a regular basis. And there have been times when everyone has gone beyond that and given to extra causes in a very generous way with their time and talent and their resources.

When I first came to the parish St Silas was still to be paid off and there was a debt of \$19,000 dollars. Gordon Langrell who was the priest in charge challenged the parish to pay the debt off by the time the new vicar came and so the new church could be consecrated. Money was given out and people were invited to multiply it. And by the time I arrived as we celebrated the 75 year anniversary of St Silas it was paid off. We were able to consecrate St Silas that same year. What incredible generosity from everyone.

In recent years we have been blessed with heritage grants to refurbish St David's which has meant this beautiful 120 year old church has been set up for a bright future.

We have also received a bequest so we can renovate the add on and upgrade the kitchen and lounge foyer area. This is an awesome gift.

With the sale of St Johns we have been graciously given the opportunity to have Josh and Ruth on our team and build up our ministry to families and young people. 13 youth are going to Deeper camp this weekend.

We have also been able to use the interest off this fund to pay for the reroofing of St Silas and to paint the church interior as we upgrade this lovely facility. We received \$67 k in interest last year. This past year has been a different story.

We have given a grant to redo the floor and sound proofing in the hall and we are raising extra funds so we can do it in a future proofing way by seeking support from the hall users.

God has been so generous to us as we seek to reach out in this community and share his good news.

We have an awesome finance team who are managing all our assets.

We as a parish, like everyone individually here are facing some huge cost of living payments in the present global financial climate and in the aftermath of the covid pandemic. We are doing some serious thinking about how to refine our budget going forward.

Today's day of giving is to offer you all an opportunity to consider a one off gift to bless the parish if you are able to and to assess your regular giving going forward.

Each one should give what they have decided in their heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver.

And so how should we give?

- 1 Give our love and worship to God. Bring him our first love
- 2 Commit ourselves, our time and talents to serving him.
- 3 Care for the earth and the resources he has given us in a wise and sustainable way.
- 4 Be content with what we have.
- 5 Give what we are able with a generous heart to God's work. Every gift given whether big or small is received with grateful thanks.

1 Chron. 29:14 (MsgB)

"But me—who am I, and who are these my people, that we should presume to be giving something to you? Everything comes from you; all we're doing is giving back what we've been given from your generous hand.