

## ***Principles of Giving***

**1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor 8:7-12; Mt 6:19-25, 33-34**

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It's time! We haven't done it for 3 years. It really is time! ... for a gift day.

I was reading "The Church-English Dictionary" yesterday and thought you might like a few definitions:

- Abasement: A room carved out of the ground where you keep goods for the next jumble sale.
- Absolution: An alcohol hand cleanser used by clergy. If it isn't dry by the end of service wave your hands in the air up and down and side to side.
- Treasurer: Short arms, deep pockets – [not ours].
- Tithe: Conclusive proof that some churchgoers earn \$20 per week – [never here!]

### ***Gift Day***

I think we need regular opportunities to review our giving. We did in 2009 and 2010. In 2011 we had the Big Push to raise the last bit to be able to build this building. Remember, how God worked amazingly through us? You pledged \$152,000 in two weeks towards the building project and made it possible to go ahead. Through the project, you continued to give and I felt you either were giving or needed a rest from any exhortation after such a sterling effort.

I want to acknowledge the wonderful mission giving last year and this as we have supported the Hope Project, Kondo, the mission trip there and the teams to Tonga.

However, it is time for each of us to reassess our level of giving for a number of reasons:

1. Circumstances change; income may go up or down; discretionary spending money changes with circumstances.
2. New members need to have the opportunity to make a financial commitment.
3. God works in our hearts and we may decide we what to give a different proportion or amount.
4. We have a special reason to reconsider now.

At the AGM, I reported on attendance figures for last year. The average Sunday attendance had grown to 138. Peter Lloyd one of our synodsmen and formerly a Parish consultant made the point strongly that with those numbers we not only need another fulltime staff member now but actually we needed that person a while ago. We noted that we need to encourage a younger age group of parents and their children to attend and Peter pointed out that leaders basically attract people within ten years of their own age.

Peter Little then proposed that the Vestry should draw up a job description and present it back the parish and that we should increase our giving to meet the need. That resolution was passed unanimously by the AGM.

Vestry has consulted, thought carefully and produced the job description; it was posted on the notice board last week. The next stage is for us to increase the parish income so we can afford the extra staff member – we are already part way there. When we do that, we are ready to advertise.

With all that in mind, we need a gift day and will have it in a couple of weeks – so let's turn our minds to the subject of giving.

## ***Giving Principles***

In both epistles, Paul wrote about collecting a relief fund for Christians in Jerusalem. His principles are good for general giving as well.

The reading from 1 Corinthians in one verse lays down three important principles for us. "On the first day of the week, set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income."<sup>1</sup> He is talking about regular, proportional giving as part of our worship.

### **Regular**

"On the first day of the week" – that is Sunday. - there you have regular giving. Is your giving done regularly or in a haphazard manner? Do you give only when you happen to have the cash in your pocket, or do you plan and organise to be able to give? A pledge sets an amount you plan and promise to give. Of course, you may give more but it gets the difficult decision over and done with and you can relax into the joy of giving.

### **Worshipful**

Paul instructs them to do it on Sunday. By that time in the early church, they were already meeting on Sunday - the day of the Resurrection. Our giving is part of our worship. It is part of expressing our trust in God. Did you know the English word "worship" derives from "worthship"? Through our giving we make a practical demonstration to God of his worth to us. Our giving is as much part of our worship as prayer, praise, Christian fellowship or taking communion.

### **Proportional**

"Set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income" – there you have proportional giving. Is your giving proportional to your income? That means in prayer we decide on a proportion of our income and continue to give that proportion.

### **Grace**

Moving on to the text from 2 Corinthians, we see that giving is a grace. Grace is about free giving because of love rather than duty.

In all Paul's writing about giving he uses relationship words: blessing, priestly service, fellowship/sharing, service and grace<sup>2</sup>. For Paul, giving money carries many meanings which relate to worship and human relating to God. The reason to give is what God has already done for us. It is not to earn anything or manipulate God or man.

### **Follow through on commitments**

And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. <sup>11</sup> Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. <sup>12</sup> For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:2

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor 9:5; Rom 15:7, 26; 2 Cor 8:4, 9:1,12,13; 1 Cor 16:3; 2 Cor 8:1,4,6,7,9

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:10-12

Paul's advice to them is that they should complete the commitment they made the previous year. Our AGM made a commitment in February. We collectively said, "We need to get on and do this; plan for it and we will fund it." So now, our Vestry has done what we asked for. The question is will we finish the work? Will we match the eager willingness shown in February with the means now to bring it to completion?

Some have already started giving specifically for this purpose – well done and thank you! We do need to remember that an extra staff member is an continuing cost, not a one-off, so our commitments need to be sustainable.

This is a group commitment. None of us is solely responsible, but we do need to be willing.

### **According to our means**

God does not expect us to give what we do not have and in case you are not sure – neither do I! His expectation is proportionate to our means. Give according to your means: if your means have changed, that is fair enough.

Some are not free to give because of an unbelieving spouse. It can be difficult in that circumstance in that you do not have freedom to do as you would wish – God understands your circumstances.

### **Motivated by His Grace**

Our motivation lies in the self-giving of Jesus:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. <sup>4</sup>

Jesus is the example of how grace joyfully expresses itself in love.

### **Anxiety**

But we may find - most of us do find - that part of us is anxious at the prospect of giving beyond a token amount. What if there is not enough left for me?

Jesus warns us firmly in the gospel reading that there is a real danger in how we handle wealth. He starts with the command not to build up wealth on earth, which is subject to decay. Earthly treasure does not last and our hearts are drawn to whatever we treasure.

Then he speaks of the eyes. Verses 22 & 23 have caused much confusion for commentators.

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

Jesus used an Aramaic idiom. In the parable of workers in the vineyard, workers are employed from different times of the day but at the end of the day, the master pays them all the same amount. When they protest that it isn't fair, he says, "... Are you envious because I am generous?"<sup>5</sup> But the Greek is literally, "Is your eye evil because I am good?"

You see the expression "an evil eye" meant greedy or covetous while "a good eye" meant generous.

One of my commentaries puts it like this:

Jesus indicates that when the eye focuses on something of value, it becomes the conduit that fills the heart with what has been focused upon. If the eye is good, it is the conduit that allows the heart to be filled with the light of God's treasure.<sup>6</sup>

With that understanding these two verses make sense in the midst of a discussion of what we treasure and whether we will serve God or wealth.

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<sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:9

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 20:15

<sup>6</sup> Wilkins M.J., 2004, *The NIV Application Commentary, Matthew*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, p294-5

The way Jesus contrasts God and wealth, it is obvious that wealth can replace God as our object of worship. Wealth promises safety and well-being and demands obedience and service – however it never really satisfies. Do you know the best way to break the power of mammon over our hearts? It is to give money away - that dethrones the power of wealth over our hearts by scorning what it offers.

Jesus says we needn't and mustn't worry about what we will eat or drink or wear. God gives us life and bodies; he is well able to provide for us. So he calls us daily to trust rather than worrying about the future. We are given our daily bread – what we need for today - rather than the answers for problems which haven't yet happened.

He is not saying we should deny all material concern or make no provision for physical needs. He is not saying we should not be involved in business or commerce. There are clear scriptures supporting all those things. But it is important that we have no other God before Jesus and we focus our attention on his rule and righteousness. As we do that, we can trust him more fully and give with easy hearts because it is out of love and thankfulness.

As I close let me restate those principles:

We saw that our Christian giving is to be:

- regular;
- worshipful;
- proportional to our income and according to our means;
- fulfilling commitments;
- a grace motivated by God's grace;
- and trusting in God for our provision.

Through this week, please think about those principles and your giving. Next week, we will look at another aspect of giving.