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## Sermon

### ***That you may abound in every good work***

**2 Corinthians 9:6-11; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19**

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We have just heard of the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples after the resurrection. There were many appearances over that period of 40 days before he ascended into heaven.

Thomas is in the group! If you heard last week's sermon you will recognise that as good news. We saw that it was Thomas' absence at the time of Christ's first appearance that led to his unbelief. Now he is sticking close to the others where he should be.

Last week, we heard how Jesus set the scene to repeat the evening that Thomas had missed so Thomas could be reinstated after his vigorous statement of unbelief. He gave deliberately gave Thomas a chance to repent to renounce his previous statement. So too, here, Jesus reinstates Peter as a disciple after his three-fold denial of Jesus after the arrest. Charcoal fire setting, asks him three times so he can undo the three denials. Our words matter but the good thing is that the Lord gives opportunities for us to change and to get back on track.

The reading from Revelation gives us a view of the worship in heaven. The Lamb they sing about is, of course, Jesus of Nazareth who was declared to be the Lamb of God by John the Baptist when he entered his public ministry at the River Jordan. Through Holy Week we saw how Jesus fulfilled the type of the Passover Lamb which died in place of the firstborn sons of Israel. Jesus died in place of all who will put their trust in him.

Before Easter, we thought about Mary pouring out the precious anointing oil over Jesus and said what is he worth to us. Last week, we heard of the change of thinking for Thomas as he realised that Jesus really had risen from the grave and he leapfrogged the others when he declared, "My Lord and my God."

In the worship of heaven we see Jesus being given high praises and honour alongside God the Father. He is worshipped as equal with the Father for as Thomas said he is God. The worship of the angels says the Jesus is worthy to receive power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and praise.

Mary gave her most precious possession; Thomas gave his worship and loyalty. What do you give to the risen Lamb of God?

We can't give him all of those things. We can agree it is right for him to receive them from the Father. But we can give him power over ourselves by obeying him. We can give him back some of the wealth he has entrusted to us; we can only acknowledge his wisdom, strength and glory. We can contribute to his praise and give him honour in our lives.

We are called to worship Jesus as God, as saviour, as Lord. That means we will obey him in our daily lives. We will put our time and our assets at his disposal.

So let us turn to the text from Second Corinthians. Paul is encouraging them to complete the commitment they made a year before to give money for the Christians in Jerusalem who were suffering from a famine. The subject occupies much of chapters 8 and 9 and was referred to in 1 Cor 16 too. What do we learn from this for there are principles that apply to general Christian giving?

## **Proportional**

1 Cor 16:2 "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income..."

The Bible calls us to planned, regular giving. It is no honour to God to be given an occasional tip! We are expected to plan our giving and give to him on Sundays as part of our worship. It is to be in keeping with (that is proportional) to our income.

But what proportion should it be? There is no exact figure mentioned in the New Testament. Under the Old Covenant, God's people were commanded to give a minimum of 23% to support the temple, to celebrate God's goodness and for the relief of poverty. Now we are not under the Law of Moses, but before Moses, Abraham gave 10% to the priest Melchizedek. The Writer to the Hebrews makes a strong case that Jesus is of the same order of priesthood as Melchizedek.

The inference is that the model for our giving to Jesus is Abraham who gave 10% to the priest of the Most High God. At very least, we can say that since we are under grace we should not lag behind the demands of the Law. Ultimately, it is a matter for each of us to pray about and ask God what he is asking of us.

Proportion works the other way around as well. We are to give proportionally to our income but God responds similarly:

2 Cor 9:6 "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."

The way you give affects what God will entrust to you in the future. This is not about twisting God's arm to make you rich. It is about the family nature. God's nature is generosity. That same quality should show in our lives as children of our father. As we learn to be generous, he can entrust more to us, so we can be more generous with the greater amount he has put our way.

## **Attitude**

2 Cor 9:7 "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

It is clear that we are not under compulsion. The important thing is our attitude before God. He looks for good will and generosity. If we give with a sour attitude it is displeasing to God. In fact the Greek word translated, "cheerful," is the root of our English word, hilarious. God loves a hilarious giver. When you are in his will on this, you will find yourself chuckling with joy at the delight and privilege of giving.

## **Provision**

Jesus provides! We need to understand that God is the true source of all our provision. Whatever the route it comes to us, whether by wages, investments, gifts or benefits - ultimately he provides it. In the gospel account, we saw two practical examples of Jesus providing resources – in that case fish.

The disciples try all night to fish and catch nothing – then he tells them to drop the nets on the other side of the boat and they get a bumper catch. Whatever was going on, he made provision come to them through with their own effort which had previously been unfruitful.

The other provision was the fish he was already cooking on the fire. We don't know where they came from, but however they were obtained they do represent direct provision from the Lord apart from the disciples' efforts.

Paul says, "God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." 2 Cor 9:8

Never think you can't give. God wants to provide for you so you have enough to live on and enough to give away. Do you hear the strength and breadth of provision in that verse? God wants to bless you abundantly. In what manner? **All things!** When? **All times!** Well how much? **All you need!**

With what result? **That you will abound!** In what? **Every good work! Wow!**

Brian Kluth wrote,

After my book, *40-Day Spiritual Journey to a More Generous Life*, became an unexpected bestseller, I was contacted by NBC to do a TV news story. When the TV reporter interviewed me, she asked, "So, you think God wants everyone rich?" I said, "No, I don't believe that." She was a little surprised by my answer and then asked, "Well, what do you believe?" I responded, "I believe that everyone needs to learn to become more generous with whatever God has given them." She then asked, "Well, didn't your book becoming a bestseller make you rich?" I replied, "No, it helped me become more generous!" The truth is--every one of us in America is rich when you compare us to the rest of the world. What each of us needs to learn is how to become more generous with whatever God entrusts to us.

2 Cor 9:10 "Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. <sup>11</sup> You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion..."

The experience of so very many Christians is that God gives us enough for our own needs (bread for food) and to give away (seed for the sower).

Many of you have given thought to stewardship over Lent; it is fresh in your minds. How are you going to be a good steward of what God has entrusted to you?

Some of that will be expressed through other channels. Some of your stewardship is in relationships and use of your physical resources for God. Some is about how you use your gifts and talents.

When you look at the Pledge form, there is a list of roles in the parish – there may be something there that suits you. Don't be a pew-sitter – get involved, it's much more satisfying.

There is no getting away from it: a significant part of our stewardship is the use of our money and what you direct to God's work. We need to give for our own spiritual health.

Compare the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea: Both are on the River Jordan. One is fresh water and full of fish; the other is extremely salty and has no fish. What is the difference? Water flows into and out of the Sea of Galilee. But the Dead Sea only receives water and there is no outflow. The water evaporates and leaves the salts behind so the lake gets saltier and saltier.

If we receive and also give, we are kept fresh and lively like Galilee. However, if we only receive and do not give, we become more and more salty, bitter and lifeless like the Dead Sea. We need to give for our own health.

## Op Shop

It is easy to think that with the success of the Op Shop there is no need to give. However, the Parish has resolved to be generous with the profit we make—some of our customers insist on knowing what we are doing **for the community** with the money we make and about a third of our volunteers are from outside our church membership. So we give away a share to other causes: The recent AGM approved donations this year to: A Girl called Hope, Orewa Sea Scouts, bursary funds for four local schools, Values in Action and Roofs for Kondo Church.

The profits from the Op Shop also are used internally to support Tony's salary, Messy Church, CAP Job Club, the new 3D Printing Club outreach to young people and to subsidise mission trips. We have needed the Op Shop income to afford these new ministries.

If you are wondering about the budget as presented at the AGM, the bottom line was correct with a small deficit. The book keeper had shown Op Shop income less rent in the income, but other shop outgoings were still shown in the expenses.

Is there still need? Yes, with the growth of the number and extent of ministry in the parish, we need to increase our administrative support. Diane is overworked in the office and I am carrying far too high an administrative load. Vestry wants to increase the paid administrative hours to ease those burdens and make our operations more efficient.

## **Conclusion**

It is good to have a focal point each year to review our giving and make a commitment. Our circumstances change: income may increase or decrease and we need to be realistic in our giving. It also allows the parish to plan better for the year ahead.

When we have a pledge day it is an opportunity to rediscover the privilege of worshipping God through our giving. We remind ourselves of the many blessings we have received and experience the joy of responding to God's love with our gifts.

On Pledge Day we ask each individual/household in our church to make a financial commitment to our ministries for the year ahead. Please take time to reflect on God's grace and the ways He has provided for you and your family; then ask Him for the grace of giving – it is close to His heart! I hope whatever your decision about financial giving to the church, it will be made after prayer and consideration.

So take the form home with you, if appropriate discuss it with your spouse; pray about it and then bring it back next week to offer your pledge.

We have an exciting time ahead. Thank you for your participation and the support you have given. I trust that in these weeks we will discover afresh the joy of giving and implement the vision that God is giving us - that we may indeed be *growing in faith, love and mission!*