

The Sermon preached by The Rev'd Ann Mazur in St Giles Church at Langton by Wragby

on 17th March 2019 2nd Sunday Lent based on:

1 Chronicles 29. 10-18

2 Corinthians 9. 6-15

Luke 12. 22-34

Present giving is fraught with difficulty isn't it? My family always find my husband, Richard, a challenge when it comes to buying him Christmas and birthday presents. However this year it was a wee bit easier as he is building a model railway. So we were able to give him packs of models for his village. A village church, a pub, a garage and rows of houses. I gave him a static grass applicator! I don't think many people will have given that often as a present! If you want to know more ask Richard after the service!

What we give, what we present, is important as it says something about the giver - but also about the one to whom we are giving. There's a saying I have heard, "giving is the sacrament of seriousness." (repeat)

What does it mean? Well as you know a sacrament is defined as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace – a handshake is a sign of friendship, a salute is a sign of loyalty, a kiss is a sign of love; so what we give indicates how serious we are about the person or organisations to whom we are doing the giving.

Our first Bible reading today from Chronicles tells the story of the people of Israel trying to build a temple for God in Jerusalem.

King David calls all the people together, and he invites them to give gifts towards the building of this temple. They gather together, and in a big ceremony, the people bring their offerings for the temple building. They give gold and silver and bronze and iron and precious stones, heaping it all up in a big pile.

And King David looks at everything the people have given, and he prays a prayer with which we are familiar:

"Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours."

This is a prayer we often say just before the Eucharistic prayer when we have given our offerings to God and are about to offer ourselves to God in the sacrament of the Eucharist. But David looks at everything that is in front of him, at everything that the people have given, and he says this as well:

"But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill-offering? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. For we are aliens and transients before you, as were all our ancestors; our days on the earth are like a shadow. O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own."

In other words, David looks at all the wealth that is before him, for the building of the temple, and he realises something really important... he says to God - do you know what God, all this is yours anyway – you're the one who gave it to us in the first place. What are we? We're nothing – we're just people passing through this life.

Anything that we do have is from you – and we simply are giving it back to you.

This insight that David had that day, is at the heart of the Christian discipleship and at the heart of Christian stewardship. Everything we have - has been given to us by God. It is not ours. It is God's. We are not owners of anything – we are stewards. But this is not just about money and material goods, it is about everything we have - this is about our time, our gifts and skills, our very lives.

Everything we have – all our days on this earth – are a gift from God.

And with that gift comes a responsibility. God asks us to be wise and responsible, and to be good stewards of the things he has given us. And God invites us to use everything he has given us, in his service.

In our reading from the Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, which is on your service sheet, the last verse says "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift" The important word there is 'Thanks.' We have heard in the weeks since Christmas of God's overflowing generosity to us. We read of the overflowing wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. We read of the miraculous catch of fish as Jesus called his first disciples. And we all remember the feedings of the thousands who came to listen to Jesus and how the baskets were overflowing with leftovers.

Our God is a generous God.

In the last two weeks we have been considering our giving in the light of the generosity of God.

We should remember that our giving is about our overflowing love for God and by giving we are opening ourselves up to the generosity of God. "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance," says Paul.

In giving we are returning our thanks to God and becoming involved in what God is doing in the world, in his service.

In giving we are rooted in the best gift of all, our Saviour Jesus Christ, who for our sakes became poor so that we might become rich in God. "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift."

Our giving to God is a very personal act, and that act of presentation and offering is at the heart of our response to the abundant love of God revealed in Christ – which is transforming. Transforming lives offered in the service of the Father in the service of the world for the sake of the kingdom.

Our round of worship is part of that offering. Brought together in the offertory processions at the Eucharist and the offering of our gifts. God is not dependent on our offering, nothing we do adds to his glory, but I would like to suggest that **we** are dependent on that offering.

We are dependent on that offering as it leads us out of introspection and lives shut in on themselves as we consider others.

We are dependent on that offering as it places our wealth and talents as gifts to us, and not something we have created ourselves.

And finally we are dependent on that offering as it enables things to happen that might otherwise not happen.

The gospel reading today speaks of God's love for us and for his world. God does not want us to be anxious or worried, he loves to give us good gifts and he loves to give us the kingdom. God wants us to store up treasure- not as the world counts treasure but real lasting treasure that will bring to bear the values and priorities of God on the greed and anxiety of the world. "Strive for the kingdom and these things will be given to you as well,"

Stewardship, the offering and presentation of all that we are enables us to look beyond ourselves, freely receiving and freely giving. We recognise that what we have is all a gift, from the fact that we breathe, to our possessions; and that what we have can make things happen to the good.

In a moment we will stretch out our hands to receive Christ in word and sacrament and we ponder how we can present our lives and all we have as an offering to God.

Over the coming week may I encourage you to read these passages again prayerfully and pray about your response to the service next Sunday at All Saints.

May the offering of ourselves, our souls and bodies and all that we have, be a holy and lively sacrifice to God's glory, in Christ's body, the Church, that through the Holy Spirit the kingdom may come.

Amen.