

A Sermon for Giving Sunday – 5th March 2023

1 Chronicles 29 and Luke 14.27-33

Money. I would much rather preach on almost anything other than money. Yet here I am not only preaching on money but asking for it. As the Vicar of this parish, I have faith in what God has done, what God is doing, and what God will do, in this parish.

Money is always a tricky subject; we need money to survive and it allows us to have and do the things that we like to do. The lack of money also causes great anxiety and heartache – especially during a cost of living crisis with ever-increasing inflation and energy prices. The Bible talks about money a *lot*: there are over 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 on faith, but more than 2000 passages on money and our relationship with it! 16 out of Jesus' 38 parables are concerned with money and possessions.

As Christians money is inextricably linked to our discipleship and our ethics. The Bible reminds us that 'our' possessions are not really *ours*. God provides, and we are only stewards, trustees, of what we have. We are encouraged not to hold on to our worldly goods, but to use them in God's service. In blessing others, we are blessed.

'All things come from you, O Lord, and of your own do we give you.' (1 Chronicles 29.14)

Before the pandemic, I used to say this verse as a blessing after receiving the offering plate, the financial giving, from the congregation. The words are taken from King David's prayer at the consecration of the Jewish Temple, the centre of Jewish religious worship and culture. David gives thanks for the people of Israel's understanding that all is God's – that God gives – and in giving we give back to God.

The entire chapter of 1 Chronicles 29 is a thank you for the gifts necessary to build the temple as a place of worship in all its splendour. Just before our reading is a lengthy description of the bling: gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, onyx for the settings, turquoise, precious stones and marble.

For insurance reasons (and theological ones) I'm often relieved that we aren't a church with priceless artefacts. Believe it or not but there is some comfort in our rotting mouldy roof – you have taught me that we are more than our building. Numerous people warned me against becoming your vicar out of fear that most of my time and energy would be consumed in fundraising for a new roof. And yet, despite our ugly slowly deteriorating roof, our church is growing, people still want to be baptised, married, commended to God here, and worship God here together – God's splendour is here in the imperfection.

The concept of the tithe (one tenth of income) is found in the Old Testament Law. This tithe was to be given back to God, to be used for the upkeep of the community's religious life and for the benefit of the poor. Can you imagine if we all tithed? We would have an abundance rather than a shortage. Right now we are drawing on our church reserves to survive; we are relying on the past giving of those who came before us in order to maintain ourselves in the present. This can't continue because our reserves are running out and we need to take responsibility for the present and safeguard our future.

Each of us needs to pray and consider what that means for us. Life does not stand still, nor do our dealings with money: a new job or a lost job, a baby or children leaving home, a new energy bill, or a bereavement can all affect our situation and good stewardship means a regular review of where we are with our giving.

The Gospel passage we heard is titled 'The Cost of Being a Disciple' – Jesus is being highly practical: 'For which of you, intending to build a tower, does

not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, "This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.

Our church building, our temple of worship is built (even if it eventually needs a new roof) but as the body of Christ we are called to be living temples to God. I want to be a church that looks ahead – that plans, dreams, prophesies, that builds spiritually and numerically. I want us to bless each other and the community around us. We need regular giving – to know what resources we have to bless others. The gospel passage reminds us to look ahead – to plan ahead – not to start building until we have money to do so.

You may not have gold, silver, and precious gemstones but you are building this temple. If you already give: thank you. If you already give and are considering giving more: thank you. If you cannot give any more: thank you. If you haven't given regularly: please do.

You may have noticed that we turned the spotlights illuminating our church off during Lent. I want us to think about what will happen if we can no longer fund our ministry and be a beacon of God's love in our parish? What would happen if we could not serve our local community? Would we be missed? If we are not financially supported by the community, if we are not useful to the community, if we don't worship God with all of ourselves – INCLUDING our money – we won't be able to fund the ministry of this place.

Please give generously and say along with David: 'All things come from you, O Lord, and of your own do we give you.' (1 Chronicles 29.14)