**The Two Rivers Mission Community**

**Generosity – sermon 1**

**God’s generosity to us and our response**

*Old Testament reading: 1 Chronicles 29.10-19*

*New Testament reading: Matthew 25.31-46*

Today we begin a three-part sermon series looking at the subject of “generosity”, and specifically at the subject of money.

Now, we want to be clear from the outset, that the reason for doing so is not because our churches are short of money and we need to try to persuade you to put more in the collection plate.

On the whole, our churches are meeting their day to day running expenses…

No, we wanted to look at the subject of generosity and money for much more important reasons…

Firstly, Jesus talked a lot about money… more than he talked about all sorts of other things.

Jesus obviously thought that money was important.

And we as Christians, want to take seriously what Jesus took seriously.

Secondly, one of our Mission Community five guiding values is generosity…. Along with?... can you remember the others?… Love, Faith, being people of Word and Spirit, and Joy.

How we use our money will certainly impact on whether other people, and god, consider us to be generous… or not.

And thirdly, when we get our perspective on money right, there is a great blessing to be found for us and for others.

So, right at the start, let’s set aside guilt and thinking about what we *can’t* do,

And instead let’s think about the opportunity money has to do good and what we *can* do…

Let’s be positive… go on… smile!

Now recently as a mission community we shared in a series of meetings about ethics – what Christians should and shouldn’t do.

And one of the things we said was that ethics must always begin with the character of God; who God is and how he acts.

So, as we come to consider the topic of generosity and specifically money, let’s begin there…

In the Old Testament we see that God is a generous God.

He creates a world of abundance.

God places more stars in the sky than a human can count. The seas teem with fish, the skies with birds and the land with animals.

In the garden of Eden in which God placed the first man and woman, “The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food”. (Genesis 2.9).

After the Flood, God promised all humanity, “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease” (Genesis 8.22).

As the Old Testament unfolds, and God calls the Israelites to be his own, we see God pour out his abundance on this chosen group.

In the desert, God provides manna and quail for the people to eat.

He leads them into a land flowing with milk and honey.

The New Testament is characterised by what has become perhaps the most famous verse of the bible:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave… he gave his own son… that whoever believes in him might not die but inherit eternal life.” John 3.16.

God loves… so God gives.

Paul picks this theme up in Romans 8.32:

“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

Paul is so convinced by God’s ultimate generosity in giving his son for the salvation of humankind that he has no doubt that God will give us everything we could possibly need.

So, if we truly believe that we as human beings are made in God’s image… to model God in the world…

If we truly believe that as followers of Jesus, we are called be think and act like our master,

Then surely God’s call upon our lives is to live generously.

Living generously will take many different forms.

We will want to be those who are generous of spirit – those who think the best of others, and act with grace towards others.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.” says Paul in Philippians 2.3

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. (Romans 12.9-10).

And we will want to be generous with our resources: our time, our skills and abilities, and our money.

In our Old Testament reading this morning we heard how God’s people gave generously to build a temple for God in Jerusalem – for the worship of God and as a centre of religious life.

In our New Testament reading we heard how it is those who use their time and money to care for the poor and needy who Jesus welcomes into his kingdom.

We have many opportunities to act like God and show generosity.

And there is a blessing in doing so.

Perhaps the most important blessing is that in being generous we bring joy to *God’s* heart.

“God loves a cheerful giver” says St Paul (2 Corinthians 9.7).

But as we show generosity, we also bless *others*.

Whether that’s in forwarding the work of the gospel, and enabling people to find a relationship with God through Jesus,

Or through helping those in need.

And, generosity beings joy to *our* hearts too.

Acts 20.35; “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

We need to be honest, that being generous is hard.

Our time is precious,

We have limited energy,

We’ve worked hard for our resources and don’t we deserve to enjoy them a little?

But God does not ask us to give what we do not have.

He asks that with what he has been generous enough to give to us, we use to generous towards him and others.

Do we want to bring joy to God’s heart?

Do we want to grow to become more like God?

Do we want to bless others?

Do we want to be blessed by God ourselves?

By being generous we have the opportunity to do all these!

May we pray…

As we conclude this sermon in prayer, I’ll read a prayer that will be familiar to many of us… the Book of Common Prayer general thanksgiving:

ALMIGHTY God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men;

We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days;

through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.