

**Isaiah 25.1-9; Psalm 23; Philippians 4.1-9; Matthew 22.1-14**

We are hearing a lot about generosity this month – Transforming Generosity is the theme for the Diocesan podcasts that journey through the Gospel of Luke through the lens of generosity – the generosity of God and how we can receive and outpour that generosity into the hearts and lives of others who are yet to experience that.

Ian pointed out to me that I had mentioned the word ‘generosity’ quite a few times at the Harvest service – I made the point then – and yes, here we go again this morning!

I think one of the reasons I am passionate about the idea of being generous is based on my own experience....

Growing up, although we didn’t have much money, I now understand my parents gave me what they could at the usual times when children were oblivious to the cost and just wanted the toys and trimmings that went with birthdays and Christmases – their love was expressed in a generous way through the financial implications this would have imposed on them – in fact they used to save all year to ‘splash out’ at Christmas with gifts and goodies – we used to have wonderful Christmases that way.

But more than that – they ‘splashed out’ with the generosity of their love – they wanted to give us a great experience that children love – because they loved us – and they did so the best they could. They did it wisely too, it has to be said, because they didn’t go beyond their means – well not too much – and kept things in order – which isn’t always easy to do these days with the expectations people have about keeping up with the latest gadgets and trends in order to be seen to be ‘successful’ ‘happy’ fulfilled’ – but it doesn’t work that way, does it?

Jesus knew that – he knew the heart of human nature in all its abilities to be generous – and to be selfish. All through his teachings – especially through parables – he was trying to show people how to tip the scales and to give weight to the heart of generosity – of love – of kindness – of compassion – of fairness – but equally of time – of talent – of money. Indeed 11 out of Jesus’ 39 parables are about money – because actually, Jesus knew what money was – and what it wasn’t. He knew that God was the source of everything including money – and we were stewards of that just as we are of his creation, including each other. Jesus also knew that insecurity immobilised us from seeing finances in that way – and that we had a need – then and now – to sometimes hang on to what we have because we were afraid we were going to lose out and be without – or in another way, he knew we would also become envious of those who had more and create a need for wanting more which would always keep us unfulfilled...

It is hard to get a balance when thinking about giving in all its entirety and we can’t help but see it in financial terms at first hand because it seems that everything in the world comes down to money. But Jesus tells us that is not so – it might seem that way – and it might seem that money causes all sorts of troubles – but actually, it’s what we do with it that drives the troubles and misgivings – so don’t be fooled by the scenery of the world, he tells us – remember the source of all....

Generosity of heart and of love doesn’t create fear and insecurity and doesn’t come from a place of fear and insecurity. It comes from a place of knowing that we are loved first – beyond measure – by a loving God who will supply all we need to live a fulfilled life – a life of fulfilment with or without abundance of wealth because fulfilment in God – the fulfilment Jesus teaches – is about the language of the heart – about love.

The reading from Philippians speaks into this so much for me.

Some of you might have known Barbara Lambert. Barbara sadly died in July but her spirit lives on and I always think of her when I hear this reading because – while a self-confessed ‘not sure about all this’ person of faith, she lived out Christian values in love, goodness, passion for life, joy of her family and friends, and gratitude of all that she had and experienced of life – and weathered the ups and downs of life in equal measure. Indeed, I first met Barbara when I took the funeral of her husband, Robert which as you might know, is surely a very tricky time for anyone.

But through that – and her generosity of heart we became friends, and at a time when I needed some space and peace – she gave me the use of her little house on the Suffolk coast to enjoy and find peace in the nature and tranquillity of that place – and continued to do so right up until last year... She also gave of

her time, her support – and even attended the first Alpha here - never let it be said that she wasn't open to exploring – and we have also given thanks to her a couple of times for her financial support for St Peter's in all that it was trying to achieve – because actually - all that we are trying to do – bringing the Love and hospitality of God to other – she indeed experienced....

Barbara loved this reading – it was her school reading – and was read at her funeral. She said it stood for everything that she understood practical Christianity to mean – and it is also from where the rooted and traditional Church Blessing comes from...

In this letter Paul shows incredible generosity of spirit – because he is actually in prison when this letter was written, but despite what he is up against, he is thinking of the flourishing of the proclamation of the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus and how that is to play out in living life.

Paul encourages his brothers and sisters whom he loves – and that includes us all these years later to 'stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.'

And he urges his 'loyal companion' that he is writing to at the church at Philippi to help the women Euodia and Syntyche (and please note that women were prominent in Paul's ministry regardless of the propaganda telling us otherwise!)

'for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.'

Let's hear again what he says:

*'Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.'*

*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.'*

And keeping that in mind, we turn to the parable of Jesus we have heard today – where he tells us about a grand banquet held by a king who has invited the rich and famous to attend – but one by one they dropped out and ended up enemies of the king.

The leaders of Israel were like these guests – refusing to attend God's party thrown for his son and now all Jerusalem followed – the Messiah was here and they didn't want to know – no wonder Jesus wept for them.

But God can bless even in the mess and so the messengers of God Jesus then chose were not of the elite – but of the fishermen and tax collectors – and riff-raff and blind and lame and the sinners and the prostitutes – all receiving the generous gift and going forward and proclaiming likewise in their newfound freedom from darkness because God loved them to, albeit a tough love that demands transformation and change into leading the life he calls us into – yes, the generous life of love.

It makes you wonder why those who should have known better would behave like that – but Jesus is making the point that while people might be invited to such generous hospitality – not everyone will accept the invitation – regardless of who they are or what they are.

While Jesus might have been making a point to those who had it in for him – despite him being sent by God – nevertheless the invitation is there for all to receive – and that most generous invitation from God to enter into his kingdom of love and hope and comfort and strength and all the inner characteristics we need to be resilient in this earthly journey of ups and downs – is ours for the taking – no cost, no price – just the price of an open mind – and an open heart.

And the open heart that receives God's generosity will then be able to pass it on which in turn increases our sense of peace and belonging – and – while that seems to be in the giving of what we have – actually, doesn't it sound and mean something more lovingly powerful when we talk about the SHARING of what we have – regardless of what it is we are sharing.

From this parable for us today in the way we are thinking through things this month in the context of generosity – especially in our own situation of spiritual and financial wellbeing and sustainability here at our beloved St Peter's – we can see that we can give we can give freely in trust. We CAN share and share in brave and faithful trust that it all belongs to God anyway and that we will all give and receive what we need in this circle of life and love that we are all caught up in and belong to

So let's meditate and pray this week for our deeper hunger and longing to receive God's amazing and generous invitation to the banquet and feast of love – today and always and in all times.

Let us pray

We praise and thank you, O Christ, for here we receive you, here the memory of your passion is renewed, here our minds are filled with grace, and here a generous pledge of future glory is given, when we shall feast at that table where you reign with all your saints for ever. Amen