

I'll be honest prior to coming to these churches, I did not know what to expect. When I snuck in one Sunday, I found you friendly and welcoming and faithful. On being here now for nearly a year, I continually praise God for your faithfulness. In some churches you get a select few that do, but here I really do see you as the Body of Christ.

Many of you are not only faithful in your presence but faithful through your actions. There is involvement in services, in fund raising, in prayer and bible study, in reaching out through Little Angels, through Sunday Club, pastoral visiting, through the provision of refreshments each Sunday and through welcoming new people. You are generous to couples being married, through preparing the church with flowers. You have been faithful in thinking of the future of this church through building projects. You are faithful in your worship, through your regular presence. Many of you are faithful in prayer, faithful in wanting to be healed, restored, faithful to God, to each other and to the church.

The widow in our reading today was also applauded for her faithfulness. She had very little but she gave all she had. This thankfulness and faithfulness showed tremendous trust in God. She may not have known where her next pennies were coming from but she knew she had to give to the Lord what she had. Throughout the Bible we read not of a National Benefits system, not of Job seekers allowance, but rather we see time and again that God called His people to provide for each other. Time and again as in our reading from Deuteronomy we see God provided for all people through encouraging everyone to be thankful and to share. The Israelites were called to give back to the Lord from His generosity to them. Israel were generous givers – they knew what it was like to be captives and refugees from their days in Egypt.

God provided for the poor through commanding gifts to be made to the poor, to widows, to orphans and during times of harvest, farmers were to live gleanings for the poor to collect. We see this in the Book of Ruth.

*To give generously is to give with an open hand.
If your hand is open, you are more likely to receive.*

We see this through God's people giving of their first fruits, giving back a tenth of their crops, giving to projects such as the building of the Temple. Time and again out of what they received, they were called to give back to the Lord. Such giving enabled other people to receive. Just consider the world – if the whole world shared, would there be any poverty? 1 Chronicles 29:14; 'all things come from you and of your own do we give you.' To give is to remember that it is God who gives to us. The Israelites gave of their first fruits and gave a tithe to remember the true owner of everything, the giver of all things.

How we plan and how we give speaks of what priority we attach to the gifts God gives us. Perhaps this widow knew she was dying and gave wanting to see God use her gifts. Some people are very generous through living legacies to the church and this is wonderful and bless them. Every so often though I wonder whether it is better to give in life than just death as you can then see the money being used. Wonderful people I know have left legacies for a loo or for comfy chairs, and I think, how much better for them to have enjoyed such gifts in their life time. To be able to sit on those comfy chairs, to have used the loo!

**So we are called to be thankful, to respond to God, to give to God,
and thus a stewardship campaign looms.**

Until a few months ago when I started researching this, I was committed to tithing, giving of 10% to God, with the additional blessing of Gift Aid which for tax payers always added 25% to any giving. In fact when we considered getting someone from the Diocese along to speak on giving, I heard their principle was to say give 5% to the church and hopefully 5% to other charities. I had intended preaching first, stating no less than 10% to the church and hoped if you heard the Diocese say 5%

well you would give 5% as that was better than 10%. However in research and Bible Study I came to see indeed in the Old Testament, there was the command to tithe and to give generously for additional projects such as when the Temple needed building, but actually in the New Testament, there was no percentage or figure attached. Rather we see people generously giving, not limited by an amount. During Lent we saw the Early Church sharing their possessions, selling fields for the needs of others - genuine generous sharing.

Money is a good servant but a terrible master, like sea water it cannot satisfy
our thirst and will always leave us wishing for more.

Charles Wesley took this seriously and looked at how much he required to live. He decided £30, it was after all the 18th Century. But as a consequence if he was given more than this amount he gave it away. One year it was reported he gave away £1400!

Perhaps the thought should be, not how much do I give away,
but rather how much do I need to keep.

Giving means trusting in God – Jack and I took on this post knowing it was provided for; 25% Ospringe, 25% Davington and 50% Missioners Post. But the latter only lasts for 5years. We are 1 year into this, we could be gone in 4yrs. Compared to other church posts, this does not offer much security. Compared to the Army, quite frankly we were crazy to leave, with that pension, I could have retired in a few yrs with few financial worries. However we trust in the Lord for His provision. Whether I remain as parish priest here remains to be seen. Can we as the churches of Faversham provide for our Priests and Churches? Many think we can't. I would like to believe we can.

As we enjoy our salvation and fellowship, I hope we can all agree we have much to be thankful for, we have an overwhelmingly generous God who is faithful to our needs. What is our response?

Let us be praying, let us collect or download our packs, digest and pray.