

HOLY TRINITY SUNNINGDALE

Readings: 2 Cor 8:1-15
Luke 18:18-30

Date: Sunday 29 January 2012 – Gift Day

Two weeks ago we had our Vision Day where we talked about faith, love and hope - the hallmarks of our life together as church family here at HTS.

This morning we come to Gift Day – which we had for the first time last year and now it's the second time it's become a tradition!

I am going to look with you at:

- a. The example of Jesus
- b. The example of other Christians
- c. The importance of giving
- d. The question of desire

a. The example of Jesus

I have had the most wonderful week away in Israel/Palestine, the Holy Land.

Four days in the south in Jerusalem and three days in the north in Tiberias by the Sea of Galilee. The weather was mixed and the group large. I have been twice before and I saw things I had seen previously and some things for the first time this year. I hope that we might plan a trip for those who would like to come in the autumn of 2013.

Last Sunday we were in Jerusalem.

There were two formal options for morning worship - at the Anglican Cathedral of St George's or at the Scottish Presbyterian Church of St Andrew's.

My friend and I instead took one of the less structured options and went back to the church of the Holy Sepulchre where we had visited two days before. That time the place was crawling with visiting groups and the press and crush were considerable. This time there was a peaceful sense of worship involving different groups in different parts of the building. We heard some wonderful singing and followed the sound up four flights of stairs to an upper Chapel room. There the Armenian Church was sharing in a Communion Service with a robed choir of 20 young men in their 20s. Chance would be a fine thing!!

It was breathtakingly simple and really moving. The elderly priest held up the bread and the wine, to remind us that whatever the context of the communion it's about Jesus and his extraordinary and sacrificial death on the cross.

On the plane there had been a rather peculiar choice of movie – two of them were really graphic and unpleasant in the way they portrayed the life of the gang and the world of the mercenary. Drive and Killer Elite showed us how it was for the vigilante driven to kill for a perceived injustice and a retired soldier who wanted to put wrongs right.

In the church of the Holy Sepulchre – the place of sacrifice, Calvary, Golgotha, we were reminded as if we

needed it of an altogether different kind of death and dying: the horrific, violent, bloody and painful experience of the first Good Friday. This was the cost of the forgiveness of our sins; this was the price paid for the relationship with our heavenly Father to be restored. We must never forget what he was willing to give for us. His life for our lives. A free gift of grace.

b. The example of other Christians

In 2 Corinthians, Paul is explaining how a church, even though its membership was poor, could be a blessing to others and set the bar high and the pace fast for generosity and ready response to vision.

It is an interesting fact that Oxford Diocese is low in the table of per capita giving across the country. I met a vicar from Guildford Diocese who has people in his congregation who talk about being asset rich and cash poor. He tells them that is just tosh and just an excuse for their unwillingness to give and release resources for the kingdom. He is clearly much braver than I am!

Christians can be amazingly imaginative when it comes to giving:

- i. In some churches people sell property to advance the kingdom – they downsize and give the money they don't need to the church to further its mission and ministry;

- ii. In some churches people buy property for the church to accommodate a music minister or youth worker or a worker with the elderly;
- iii. In some churches people ask their employers if they can work just four days a week and give the fifth day to God for his use in the church.

I was at a diocesan gathering just before I went away to the Holy Land. I heard Professor Sir Albert Aynsley-Green speak about the importance of focus on a particular area of ministry. His background was in the medical field and his passion was for children. He had served the Blair government as Children's Commissioner. To see the kingdom advance, he said, it just needs a person or people with passion and energy for a group of people or a situation where help, support or encouragement are required. What could be more important than that, he asked us. And what more thrilling example of Christian response could there be?

c. The importance of giving

So often people say to me that they don't know how much to give.

In the Bible the OT speaks of a tithe – 10% of your income. The NT speaks of giving cheerfully and generously.

Thank you to those who have responded to our Autumn Statement letter. This letter was sent to those who are regular worshippers with us but who for whatever reason are not yet part of the regular giving scheme. It was also

sent to those who have not increased their giving in the last 3 yrs.

If you have not yet responded please may I encourage you to do so? Everything we offer here is free but we need to have a sense that the costs of these ministries are shared by the church family. In Southwark Diocese they have a scheme called TRIO – The Responsibility is Ours. We can and should all have a part to play.

We might want to ask how much we give to the work of the kingdom compares with the amount we spend on ourselves, our families, our houses, our gardens, our cars, our holidays, our leisure.

People are often amazed that churches receive no government subsidy (other than the Gift Aid tax benefit) and that our work is entirely funded and underwritten by those who have died and given generously in the past or by the giving of the living.

Giving to the work of the kingdom generously and cheerfully is not some kind of optional extra for the really keen disciples. It's a basic and fundamental responsibility of every believer.

And finally...

d. The question of desire

There's something here about where all this begins. It doesn't begin with the putting of money in a plate nor in

rearranging our timetable or portfolio ... it begins in the heart. The heart of the matter here is the matter of the heart.

Desire to give whether it's tithe, time or talent begins in the heart- response to all that Jesus has done for us, all that we hear other Christians have done or are doing, and in the way the Holy Spirit works in us when we pray about what we should do.

Giving is a blessing to the giver and to the recipient. Perhaps I can offer some examples of this?

- i. Soon it will be our Lent Appeal for Muheza Hospital, Tanzania. Over the years we have been able to give more and more of what we have to help the doctors there do their thing. The reaction of and in those who know of our gifts is extraordinary. For a parish church to give as we have given is a remarkable and very significant thing for them and for USPG who sponsor them. When we visit, we are treated like VIPs and given the best of care and attention. Zoe discovered this at first hand this past summer. Our giving had been a real blessing to those on the front line as well as to us as we give.
- ii. Yesterday I was in the newsagent, paying for the papers. The man behind the counter saw my wallet as I got my money out to pay and he saw what he thought was Scottish currency. I explained that it was not Scottish, but American Dollars – the usual currency we use in Israel. I

could tell he had never seen one of these notes before. As I left I turned back and asked if he would like one. And I passed it to him. His eyes lit up and he said "To keep?" And I said: "Yes, it's a gift". Our giving (simple though it may be sometimes) can be a blessing to those who receive as well as to us as we give.

- iii. On our trip to the Holy Land we visited an orphanage and a hospital in Bethlehem. At each place people had been invited to take some things which might help with the work. You could see from the reaction of those who left their gifts and those who received them, that there was important business being done that day for both parties. Our giving can be a blessing to those who receive as well as to us as we give.

So the desire to give comes from our heart attitude to what God has done in Jesus, from what we see others doing and from the work of the Spirit deep inside.

Therefore, my challenge for is this Gift Day is a very straightforward one. It's not to give to our MAP projects as it was in 2011. There will be time later this year to ask us to give generously to help provide a permanent solution to our temporary dislocation from CMI.

No, my challenge is this: to pray for the desire to give ourselves ... our tithe, our time and our talent in 2012, a year when monarchy will be celebrated, faithful royal rule honoured and records broken. May God take our heart

attitude this year to a new level that we may be more and more effective for the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Let me finish with the words of a hymn we sang in the Carol Service, one of my favourite sets of words which we can use as a prayer: thou who wast rich.