

10.15am
Matthew 25:14-30

8 March 2020

Growing our Giving II: Regularity

Let us pray

Gracious God, as we consider Jesus' powerful story today, help us to listen and respond to your word, to be good and trustworthy stewards of all you have given us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Last week Geoff told us that our sermons for these first three weeks of Lent are about the principles of giving- and yes, as he rightly admitted, they are about MONEY!

I hope you've had a chance to read the leaflet you received on your way into church last week or today, and if so you will recognise that we are thinking for these three weeks about how we give:

generously, regularly and cheerfully.

The way we give really matters because giving is a key part of living out our faith in Christ. Jesus pulled no punches when he spoke about wealth and poverty, and he was following the Jewish teaching which built generous, regular and cheerful giving into all their religious practices

We are creatures of habit, aren't we, for better or worse?! We need to train ourselves to give well, to give as God wants us to. So, to recap Geoff's excellent sermon last week, we give generously in response to all that God has freely given us. God's generosity is clear also in today's first and second readings: God blesses Abram and through him, all the earth: through faith in Christ, *we* are heirs of Abraham and inherit that same generous blessing from God.

But, if we don't respond **generously** we become greedy and selfish – we stop recognising God's goodness and being open to his blessing in our lives. We can see this in ourselves and in so much human behaviour around us today, as always.

And that is why, to come to today's principle, we need to make giving both a priority and a habit: we need to give **regularly**-

Lets look at the story we heard from Matthew's gospel

Three slaves are entrusted with different amounts of money by their master, before he goes away for a while. Let's call them Obed, Fred and Ted. Obed receives five talents: a talent is a significant weight of silver, so this is a very large amount. Up for the challenge, Obed goes off 'at once' and trades with the money, and doubles it.

Fred, with 60% less money than Obed, doesn't moan about the comparison but 'in the same way', he goes straight off to use the money wisely, also doubling the sum he was given..

So far, so good. Both Obed and Fred make it a **priority** to use what's been entrusted to them by their master, on his behalf. And the trading they do requires regularity – trading always does. A shop which open irregularly won't make a profit. The online service which fails to deliver on time won't get repeat business. The unreliable tradesperson will lose their customers. Obed and Fred both display **regularity** in the way they use their money so that, when the master returns, both are commended for being good and trustworthy.

But not so Ted.

Far from taking his talent- still a good sum of money, remember- and seeing what he can do with it, he digs a hole and buries it, then just leaves it there. No investment, no regular efforts to make the talent grow. And when the master returns, Ted only makes excuses and is castigated for being lazy and wicked.

We may have a certain amount of sympathy for Ted. He is afraid of his master and plays safe. I've read that burying money was common practice and even commended by some Jewish teachers of Jesus' day! Perhaps Jesus is having a dig at the Pharisees here.

What we do know is that Ted acts as he does because his understanding of his master is very limited. He doesn't see the **generosity and trust** with which the master gives him his talent. He only sees high expectations and perhaps the fact that the other two were given more than him. It's possible Obed and Fred have been in the household longer and proved themselves trustworthy with just one talent in the past.

We don't know, but we can recognise in Ted, and in ourselves
the fear which leads to foolish decisions,
the anxiety which paralyses,
the inaction which leads to tragedy.

Because Ted doesn't trust his master, he misses out in every way, while Obed and Fred experience even more of their master's generosity.

So what has this got to do with St Brandon's and us?

How can we ensure we are like Obed and Fred, and not like Ted in the way we use what has been entrusted to us, by God?

Firstly, let's recognise that God has entrusted us with so much- and the challenge is for us to respond generously. To use our wealth, our many gifts, our unique location and history, our stunning building, to God's glory and to demonstrate his love to others.

We need to **give regularly** for our own sake, - it's part of our discipleship- our 'training in righteousness'. We recognise that all we have, whether we are five talent wealthy people or one talent just ticking over, all of it comes from God. We need to prioritise regular giving and the simple way to do this is through a standing order, so that it leaves our bank accounts regularly, whether or not we are here to put a donation in the plate on Sunday mornings.

I know we all struggle with this, but I also know that God is faithful and supplies all our needs as we trust him for the future financially as well as spiritually. Regular giving is good for us!

It's also good for others- here's why.

St Brandon's has a high proportion of members who give regularly by standing order and I want to thank you for your generosity and faithfulness. Because of you we have been able to maintain our ministry, look after our building, give to several charities and also increase what we contribute to Durham diocese by 5% for each of the last 3 years, in response to our Bishops' request. The PCC could not have done all that without the certainty of receiving your regular donations, month by month. These gifts have helped many people, not least other churches across the diocese to

continue in ministry and mission when their resources are fewer than ours but the needs are very great. We hope to continue to do this but we're not yet sure whether we can maintain this generosity, because of the shortfall in our income. James will explain more about this in the notices. But I also want to ask you, as a principle and in response to all that God has given us, -

- If you don't yet give regularly by standing order, please think about making that change now.
- And if you *are* one of those brilliant regular givers, will you consider an increase, and as close to 20% as possible, since this is the gap we face?
- In your giving leaflets there are tear-off pledge forms for you to fill in your response, and an envelope to put it in (spares at the back). Please put these in the collection plate, either today, next Sunday or any Sunday in Lent. Only the Treasurer will look at these, pledges and will let us know how we are getting on towards our goal of at least £1000 per month increase in regular giving.
- When we divide that by the number of regular worshippers the numbers aren't so huge, and please be assured that everything you are able to give, however much or little, will make a real difference.

Thank you.