

**Brancepeth sermon**  
**6 September 2026**

Genesis 1:26-31

Matthew 6:19-24

Psalm 8

*Open our ears, O Lord,*  
*to hear your word and know your voice.*  
*Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills,*  
*that we may serve you today and always. Amen.*

Parents have many ways of making their children's lives a misery,  
and one of our favourites, with our children,  
is repeatedly quoting things from 1980s popular culture.  
1980s pop songs;  
1980s TV programmes;  
and – probably the worst – 1980s advertising jingles.

One of our children will say something perfectly innocent –  
eating some biscuits, for instance, and saying,  
quite without any sense of foreboding, ‘They’re tasty...’  
and Hester and I will be unable to restrain ourselves from responding,  
‘They’re tasty, tasty, very, very tasty – they’re ve-ry tasty.’  
There’s no excuse for that kind of behaviour, I know,  
but we do it anyway.

And when I was writing this sermon yesterday,  
I had the idea of beginning it with a quote from another 1980s advert,  
something about the product being ‘for the man who has everything’.  
It was an advert I could only half remember –  
I couldn’t actually pin down the memory of what product it was for,  
and when I tried to track it down online,  
I discovered that the same line had been used so many times,  
to advertise so many different products  
from at least the 1940s onwards  
that I couldn’t, in the midst of all that,  
pick out the specific 1980s advert that was niggling at my memory.

Nevertheless, I do remember the slogan, and the implied question,

‘What *do* you give to the man who has everything?’

Aside from a cardboard box to keep it all in, that is?

And the whole reason that I had that question in mind at all

was because I had found myself asking a related question

when I thought about today’s readings,

about the meaning of a Harvest festival,

and about the gifts that I knew we would be

bringing up to the altar this morning.

If *God* in some sense ‘has everything’ –

if everything that exists in some sense already ‘belongs’ to God,

what on earth can we *give* to God?

Does the idea of *giving* anything to God even make sense?

What *do* you give to the God who has everything?

Well, I’m going to come back to that question in a bit,

but, in our readings this morning,

the most obvious kind of giving depicted  
is not *us* giving things to *God*,  
but *God* giving things to *us*.

In fact, our readings show us that we human beings are  
recipients of all kinds of gifts.

In the first place, as Genesis tells us, God *made* us –  
that is, God gave us *life*, gave us *breath*, gave us our *being*;  
and God gives us God's *blessing*,  
that is, God's favour, God's support, God's promise to be with us;  
God gave us the whole earth to inhabit;  
God gave us every seed-bearing plant, every green plant for food.

And Psalm 8 tells us that God crowned us with glory and honour;  
that is, God gave us whatever dignity,  
whatever capacity for understanding and action,  
that we have as human beings,  
whatever ability we have to act as stewards of God's creation.  
God made us 'a little lower than the angels'.

God gives us ... well, *everything* we have.

Everything we have, everything that makes us who and what we are,  
is a gift from God.

God has *lavished* gifts upon us.

And, of course, as people who have *received* so much,  
it's natural not only to be grateful,  
to want to say 'thank you',  
but to want to give something in return.

After all, there is something a bit off about a relationship  
in which all the gift-giving is one way,  
one person continually giving gifts to another,  
and never receiving anything in return.

Healthy gift-giving is normally some kind of *circulation*,  
each person involved both receiving and giving -  
expressing and deepening their relationship  
by both receiving and giving.

But there's something strange about this when it comes to God.

God gives us all kinds of things that we need,  
and because we are finite and frail creatures,  
there *are* all kinds of things that we need.

We need protection, food, and shelter;  
we need love; we need hope;  
and in all kinds of ways God gives us these things.

But what can *we* give back to *God*?

What *do* you give to the God who already has *everything*?

After all, God does not *need* anything.

God does not need our money, obviously.

God is not hungry, and so God does not need  
any of the gifts we've collected here.

Nothing we could possibly give to God  
could give God something that God was lacking,  
because God does not lack anything.

Nothing we could possibly give to God  
can meet any *need* of God –  
any physical need, any psychological need,  
because God does not *need* anything.

So what *do* we give to the God who needs nothing from us?

Well, God may not *need* anything,  
but there is nevertheless something that God *wants*.  
God, after all, is love,  
and God's one desire is for the good of all God's creatures;  
God's one desire is for *our* good.

God, as Genesis tells us, made us for life, for flourishing;  
God wants us to *live*, to *grow*, to become more fully ourselves;  
God wants us to fulfil our potential;  
And God wants that not because God will get something out of it,  
not because it will be good for God in some way,  
flatter God's ego, or calm God's anxiety,  
or make God feel better about Godself;  
no: God wants us to live and grow and flourish  
for our sakes.

We are the objects of God's wholly unselfish love.  
God loves us for our own sake;  
God wants us to flourish for our own sake.

And so the *only* thing we can give to God,  
the only thing it makes any sense to try to give to God,  
is not something that God needs for God's own sake,  
not something to make God feel better,  
or to add to God's possessions,  
or to enable God to do or be anything that God is not already;  
the *only* thing we can give to God  
is our own living, our own growing, our own flourishing.

And that is why our main way of giving back to God,  
in gratitude for all that God has given us,  
is actually to give things *to one another*.

And there are two ways in which that is true.

In the first place, we give something back to God  
by giving other people the things that they need or want.  
and especially when we give things to those people  
who are struggling to live, struggling to grow, struggling to flourish.

God desires, for instance, the good of all the people  
who are supported by Durham Foodbank

and by Durham Action on Single Housing;

God desires their good, their health, their hope;

God desires it passionately,

God desires it with everything that is in God.

And so *our* gifts to *them*,

the gifts gathered around the altar this morning,

the gifts we collect in the yellow bin at the back, week by week,

they *are* also our gifts to God.

Any joy they bring, any relief, any release from anxiety, any hope –

*that* is a gift that gives God what God wants.

But there's a second kind of gift given to God here too,

because God *made us* to be both receivers *and givers*;

it is *good for us* to be both receivers *and givers*;

we *become more fully ourselves* when we are givers and receivers *and givers*.

If we clutch things to ourselves, and refuse to give,

as well as depriving others of the gifts they need,

we also harm ourselves.

As Jesus says in our gospel reading, if our ‘treasure’ –  
that is, what we desire, what we look for, what we hope for –  
is focused on ourselves, turned in on ourselves,  
and on what we can accumulate for ourselves,  
our eyes will be dark, our bodies will be full of darkness.  
Clutching things to ourselves and being reluctant to give,  
will *kill* us – slowly maybe, but surely.

Imagine that you’re a part of the body, let’s say a foot.  
If you are healthy, if you’re able to do what feet do,  
it is because of the blood that flows into you,  
because of the oxygen and the other nutrients that it brings to you,  
it is because of all that is given to you.

You flourish, you grow, you have strength,  
only because of all the gifts that you receive.

But if you were, as a foot, to think, well, all of that is mine now,  
I’m keeping hold of it all;

I need to look after myself here –  
and you don’t let that blood circulate back...

well, it's not just the other parts of the body that you will harm;  
it's *yourself*. You will start to die.

Life is not a zero-sum game.

That is, life is not a game where for one person to be a winner  
someone else has to be a loser.

Or at least something has gone very wrong  
if life becomes that kind of game.

We flourish not when we accumulate,  
not when we gather in and keep things for ourselves,  
not when we isolate ourselves from others' needs and demands,  
but when there is a healthy circulation,  
when we keep on receiving and keep on giving.  
It is when we give, just as when we receive,  
that we grow, we flourish,  
we become more the people we were made to be.

And that, too, is a gift to God  
because God *wants* us to grow, to flourish,  
and to become the people we were made to be.

‘God loves a cheerful giver’,  
as Paul says in 2 Corinthians.

So what can we give to the God who has everything?

We can give our giving.

We can give God our care for those to whom we give,

we can give God our love for them,

we can give God whatever good our gifts do for them.

*And* we can give God our growth as givers,

our growth into people who live lives of gratitude and generosity,

our growth into the kind of life for which we were made,

the kind of life that is truly good for us.

Because all that God wants,

really the *only* thing that God wants,

and the *only* thing that we can meaningfully give to God,

is for us all to become what God made us to be

and so to become what is truly good for each one of us:

to become grateful recipients and cheerful givers.

*Amen*