

*Sunday May 9<sup>th</sup> 2010. 10.30am Communion.  
BUILDING; OUTREACH; BELONGING. X19.*

**Giving to the building of God's household (God's people/ God's kingdom):** giving to fund ministry and outreach, the poor, the fabric of the building and so on. I am not here today talking about contributing our gifts and skills (something we will think about later in the month) homes and time but basically about using our resources of money.

**Matthew 26: 6 – 13. Something to think about and discuss:**

- ❖ *What do you think God considers a "good motivation" for giving money away?*
- ❖ *What motivates you to give money away?*
- ❖ *Do you expect something in return?*

<p><b><u>Motivation:</u></b> what has the power to cause you to act/ to move? What <u>incites</u> your will to action? Or even what <u>excites</u> your will to take action? (Motivation research: especially of consumers and also givers).</p>
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Is it human need? Maybe. (Most people here will support others either extended family at home or children and others through the work of things like Children Alone/ZOE in Zimbabwe, or BMS in Bulgaria, or through Betel in Brazil). There is always the danger of compassion fatigue or the constraints of recession & the giving drying up and the children going un aided. But most of us respond in some way to human need & don't just say – let them help themselves.

Is it a reasoned approach? Some might simply say, we must give a certain amount to those who have less than us or else they will revolt and all will not be well. (Greece or anywhere in the world) Most people accept that some form of taxation is necessary to provide not just services for all e.g. to have police on the street and rubbish removed but also to help support the sick, the elderly and so on. Of course there are very big ideological discussions about just how much the state should be able to take and in the next weeks and months there will be decisions about who will be helped and what will be supported.

Is it the religious law or duty i.e. you must give 1/10 of your income to look after the Temple/ the building as God commands this. As I have always said that is a tough law for the poor and an easy law for the rich. It is taught in the OT but extended I suggest expansively by Jesus into our generation.

**From our sermon last week by Becca about the generous giving of the poor widow in the Temple** we know that our Lord Jesus did not go in for a narrow view about giving percentages of our income (e.g. a tenth/ tithe) but commended the woman for giving "everything she had to live on". In the

context –*Mark 12* – of talking about love for God and for neighbour (SOFAs = i.e. “traditional Christian values!”) Jesus singles out the giving of the widow and contrasts this to the showy way some give just “what they can spare”. Note he had been speaking about the Scribes, the teachers of the Law who robbed widows of their homes and gave with the motivation of showing off and probably fulfilling the percentage requirement of the Law. Jesus commends a woman who gave “all she had to live on”. (No wonder the Disciples of Jesus felt constantly squeezed/ constrained by Jesus’ way of showing love to others. Do you feel the pressure of Jesus’ too?)

**This week we read about another generous woman – she made the disciples and especially Judas angry but she pleased Jesus and helped him prepare for death.** Generally the Disciples thought the woman should have used her money differently and Judas wanted her to put it in the common purse so that he could steal it himself. (Some people are motivated to encourage others to give more so that they can cream off more).

Insert: this significant anointing of Jesus the Messiah ready for his death is misunderstood by most of those it seems who look on. Here in Bethany an unnamed woman carries out an act of love and indeed worship of Jesus. The Disciples saw this as an act of waste and Jesus saw it as beautiful and fine. He correctly says – *we will always have poor people with us* – and we do. There is a time to feed and empower the poor. Her gift is lavish and appreciated by Jesus – it is for him. In that sense it is not to accomplish anything – it is simple a “Thank You!” – a sign of absolute appreciation. She is rewarded by seeing Jesus pleased!

### Increasing motivation to give? --

**In this world there are human obstacles that need to be removed – just as mountains need to be moved to make a level road for people to travel on.** These obstacles are removed not my human force or the exercise of human power but by the working of God’s Spirit (according to the prophet Zechariah). Jesus himself taught that through Prayer with faith we can see mountains topple (*Matthew 17: 20*). It is on this basis alone then – through the Spirit and with prayer that I can appeal to you therefore to consider what motivates you to give.

- And what motivates you to give generously?
- And what motivates you to give regularly?
- And what motivates you to give having reasoned out just how to invest in God’s kingdom?
- And what motivates you on occasion to give extravagantly and with sheer delight to Jesus?

### A few pointers that may help:

- 1) God gave first: we should give in response to God’s generosity. Jesus himself in *John 4: 10* describes the whole work of God, through the Holy Spirit as the gift of God. *If you knew the gift of God and who it was that asked you for a drink....*(Greek dorea – the free gift). This gift

of God (the Holy Spirit) cannot be bought with money as Simon the Sorcerer tried to. We are not buying favours or indulgences from God when we give. We give as a response to God – so the gift of God as we reflect on this should motivate us. (*Communion: Romans 5:12-17*)

- 2) Jesus taught that to give to those in need was in fact giving to him and not to give was to deny him. *Matthew 25: 40, 44*. This is a great motivation to give until it hurts. *Richard Wurmbrand, a Romanian Pastor* imprisoned said: *If that were Christ would you give him your blanket. When we give to the needy we give to Jesus...*
- 3) We have been forgiven much and so we should love much and therefore give much. In *Luke 7: 40 – 47* fol in the account of another anointing of Jesus he rebuked Simon the Pharisee for his lack of hospitality and generosity but also told a parable to illustrate that those who know they have been forgiven much will love much.

**It seems to me that those who reflect on how much God has given them, and done for them in Jesus Christ will become generous givers.**

Also therefore it seems that stingy or mean givers are those who do not really understand the gift of God or who Jesus is when he asks us for a drink.

Those who think that giving to God is limited by a Law that instructs us to give just 1/10 of what we receive have missed the teaching of God and the teaching of Jesus who calls upon us to love God with everything we have and to love our neighbour in the same way that we love ourselves.

God requires our love and not our blood sacrifices. (*Hosea 6: 6*)

WE are first and foremost giving to God if we are rightly motivated. It is not my love that motivates or constrains me to give (my love is limited and doled out sparingly – no it must be *the love of God which constrains us (squeezes us, compels us)* – *2 Corinthians 5: 14* to keep on giving out and sharing the message of Jesus Christ.

When we are short of motivation and not just short of cash – then we need to go back to the “gift of God” and then we will be constrained by God to give, and to give to him and his work.