

Sunday 16th May 2010. 10.30am
Building: Outreach: Belonging x20. JTH.

READ: Luke 4: 13 – 30.

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. So far we have thought about the giving that pleases Jesus: not concerned about percentage giving (1/10) so much as about giving generously, being concerned to give to Jesus first and see all our giving as "to him".

We are called to go into all the World, to make disciples for Jesus (*Matthew 28*) and also according to the Jesus Manifesto in *Luke 4: 18, 19* to *bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to set free the oppressed (Salvation generally)* – in a tangible way both spiritually and materially – sometimes it can all seem too much and we can feel dwarfed by it all. Even working together with a church it can seem just too much – not just a "big ask" from God – but an impossible ask!

Question: *Luke 4: 18, 19, 24 – 27. In a mission that seems too big and where needs overwhelm resources where and to whom do I give? What do we do & support as a church?*

The Holy Spirit enables us to do more than we would do naturally but still we have to know what we (individually as families and also as a church) are called to do – who do we help, where do we go, what are we called to do.

What are the dangers of feeling overwhelmed by it all?

Protectionism: I'll look after myself and my own – this was the first thought of the widow and son in Zarephath, nr Sidon with only a tiny bit of flour and oil. Yet she chose to give (it says God commanded her) bread she had made first to Elijah. It then became a situation where she gained for 3 years as god did not let her flour and oil run out, (She overcame her protectionism even though she had so little and shared).

Inertia – paralysing fear mixed with resentment against God – or the Elijah syndrome – Elijah felt overwhelmed by the presence and power of those who worshipped Baal - *I and I only am left God.* No says God – that's not factually true – *I have 7,000 in Israel that have not bowed the knee to Baal.* You're not the only one who has not given in to the *prince of this world, the spirit of the age.* Don't give up on doing what is right.

Guilt & Panic activity: *If the devil can't lull you into apathy then he'll jump on your back and ride you to death.* C.S. Lewis. Martha was overwhelmed by the amount of people and work that had plonked itself down in her home just because they were now following Jesus. So she just drove herself – serving the food, showing hospitality. *Luke 10: 38 – 41.* Can you believe it – Jesus gently rebuked this woman (Martha means – lady or mistress in

Aramaic- she's a type) for being too buried in domestic duty. She had made herself too busy...maybe all her own feelings of guilt and not being asked to do it by Jesus.

Overwhelmed by human need when we look just to our own resources – they will never be enough. So we decide to stop trying to extend grow of people following Jesus and go home. Illustrated in the Disciples words when 5,000 plus need feeding. (*Mark 6*). *You give them something to eat says Jesus.* They basically say, How? We haven't got enough money and even if we did – it's too expensive.

These are some of the dangers – the responses when we are overwhelmed!

Deciding on an Action Plan for engagement –giving, doing, receiving from others:

There will always be poor (ptochous) people, people in need, those who live “for daily bread” – people in need so: what to give to, who to work with since we can't do it all – even together as a church?

Jesus' statement about the work of the great Israelite prophets Elijah and Elisha might give us a few clues. *Luke 4: 24 – 27.*

- 1) During a time of drought and famine Elijah did not go to offer help to the many widows in Israel. He under God's direction (mind, dream, angelic visitation?) went to a widow in Zarephath. Account is in *1 Kings 17: 8 fol* . Here for other 3.5 years he stayed – he was cared for by a foreigner and by God who multiplied the flour and oil for the bread for over 3 years.
- 2) In his second example Jesus says that there were many people in Israel with dreadful skin conditions (leprosy) but Elisha was only called to heal one of – Naaman, the Syrian i.e. a Gentile – a foreigner, a SOFA. (*2 Kings 5: 1 -1 4*)

Both the widow and Naaman realised the superiority of the “God of Israel and how his power and love spanned across to their people.

Jesus referred to these 2 stories to challenge the national pride and narrowness of people in the city/ town of Nazareth and they didn't like it! From having been enthusiastic about his claims to be part of the messianic age they became so angry they tried to kill him by throwing him over the cliff. As Jesus said – *any prophet is not appreciated in their own country (V24)*. Elijah and Elisha weren't always appreciated and nor would he be. He was rejected in Nazareth. The Jews hated the Gentiles – some even seeing them as *created by God as fuel for the fires of hell*.

The points I take from Jesus' account to help us in our question about where and to whom do I give/ work/ share are reasonably obvious:

- 1) The narrow nationalism of the people of Israel and particularly in this case the people in the synagogue in Nazareth is not to be mimicked. (The issue of immigration is going to be a major talking point in the UK and I raise this in our international church). As people who follow Jesus in our service of God we must recognise historically that God sends his people beyond our national boundaries. God takes us to people who have nothing to do with “our God” because God is One true God and cares about all peoples. It is “traditional Christian values” that we are sent out into the world to the people of all nations & that we receive strangers in need.
- 2) We must listen to God's direction as to who we are to go to as well as what we are asked to do. There are many hungry and many sick – there are all sorts of needs –

there are the depressed, the suicidal, the homeless, the powerless of all kinds, there are the wealthy and spiritually impoverished and so on.

Illustration: I remember one Sunday when we had just seen a moving power point and Hilary Spranger had spoken to us about the work of ZOE/ Children Alone in Zimbabwe and a question was asked. Someone from the Congo asked why the work wasn't happening in the Congo since the numbers dying in the Congo was far greater.

This is a very telling question – and obviously for someone who comes from the Congo and loves their people it seems obviously that if a choice has to be made – then it would be to go and work and give there. But the bottom line is that it depends what we believe God has said to us and also that God may call someone else to do that & not us.

In Tower Hamlets and all the East London Boroughs we could argue the case for giving to many different peoples and situations. We could talk about working with children who won't / can't attend school (The GAP Project BGMC and others do that because God's told them to do that). We could talk about homeless people and God has called the Methodists and the Salvation Army to do that and now others called to help set up night Shelters. We could talk about the sex workers – and God's called the Door of Hope Project to do that, and so on. And so I could go on. Each individual, each family, each church needs an action plan that is worked out using all the faculties God has given us the people we are to give to and work amongst. Allow others to do what God is calling them to do but know from God what he is calling us to do.

Our focus for sometime has been children, youth and families and so we work on childrens' and youth projects & clubs and run social events and Meeting Point to care and show love and regularly run Alpha courses (as we're discussing today) and other events to share why we are a church & how others can become a part of this.

We cannot do everything that needs doing and indeed God does not expect that of us!

Obedience to what God has told us individually and as a church is the key to not becoming overwhelmed and succumbing to either: protectionism (self centredness), inertia (do nothing), or guilt and panic leading to frenetic activity. We can make those decisions with others at our Members meetings (Wed week) and Leaders meetings so that we can be at peace about our response to need. We each benefit if we are able to make these decisions as we listen to God but also to a group of others that we trust and relate to.