

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service and in particular with the Congregational Bible passage.

Week beginning Sunday 16 July 2017

Generous People

Pray Thank God for his wonderful generosity to us, for the depth of his love, for his work in us to share the good things we have received with others. Pray that we would see the privilege of sharing what we have with others and appreciate the joy of seeing how God can effect great things as his people share.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). 2 Corinthians 8:1-15.

Background We have to remember that Christians in the first century were very rarely well off – indeed many were poor and lived in sometimes precarious conditions. There appears to have been a system whereby believers who had more shared with those who were in need. We read of that being done locally in Acts 4 but it seemed to have been more widespread than that. Paul writing to the Christians in Corinth commended them for many aspects of their work and witness but also held up the generosity of the Macedonian Christians (from their poverty) as an example of God working in them. I take it as a gentle reminder to Paul's original readers and to us that the generosity of God ought to prompt a degree of generosity in all his people.

Possible questions/points to consider

1. There is an assumption by many that generosity is for the wealthy. What does Paul say about the Macedonian Christians' circumstances? In the light of this how should we view their generosity? How appreciative are we of those who are generous from their limited resources? How ought those who have more respond to this example? [Missionary friends have often spoken about they have received generous hospitality from people who are living in poverty]
2. What prompts generosity? Is it just that some people are generous and others less so? Paul points to the Macedonians love for God and an appreciation of his generosity to us as a catalyst for their generous giving. To what extent have we perhaps underestimated God's generosity? To what extent has western society's concern for security and well being affected our approach to generosity?
3. Someone once said that people in the UK are apt to be generous from their surplus. People in Africa (it could equally well have been Asia! And some of my friends might say Castlemilk or Pilton too) are generous anyway. I know that there are exceptions but what is your initial response to that?
4. I suggested that generosity could be faith as it became practical action – where the rubber hits the road. It isn't the only instance of that however what is your reaction to that? How far might generosity be seen as faith being worked out in practice? It is a toughy but how far does a lack of generosity on our part raise questions about our faith?
5. She would have given you her last slice of bread. Such things have been said to me at the time of someone's funeral. Paul makes the point that God accepts our gifts on the basis of what we have, not on what we haven't. Multi-billionaires can part with heaps of money (I don't doubt that is still hard) but I've known people down to their last who have given more than they can afford to help out a neighbour who they've seen to be more need than themselves. Generosity can't be measured in cash terms though sometimes it is by parting with money that we show loving concern. Comments?
6. God's love is at the heart of any response we make. How do we ensure that it is his love that drives our practical responses?

Prayer Lord, thank you for your wonderful generosity. Help us to appreciate it more and to allow it to influence the practical decisions we make about our living and our giving. Help us to see that all we have is yours, ours only on trust, and to make decisions about its use based on your generous love. Amen.