

## **Giving for Life1: Overflowing Grace – 2 Corinthians 8v1-9, Luke 10: 25-37**

The Overflowing abundant Grace of God is the great theme of today's epistle and God's overflowing grace is the theme for this first of three sessions to look at our giving under the title Giving for Life. Our PCC has been asking us to talk about giving for almost a year, so we have produced the little booklet based on Giving for Life – Giving for Life is:

- firstly Life Giving – God gives us life and loved the world so much that he gave us his Son.
- secondly Giving for Life is Giving Life – we are invited to join in with God in giving to bring life and
- thirdly Giving for Life is Giving in all of Life – that is about giving to God in all of our lives and throughout our lives in serving Him.

Yes many of you know about giving but it is vital to revisit our giving. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he says "I want you to know about the grace of God – the grace of God given to their neighbours the amazing Macedonians who overflowed in generosity and grace. For 30 years we lived in Derby 15 miles away from Nottingham, there was much rivalry between the two towns especially in football. If anyone had written us a letter saying these Nottingham folk are really generous well you can imagine the response – we Derby folk are more generous than them.

Last year Anne and I went to Spain and one day had ordered a thick rustic soup for lunch. The waiter turned up with a large soup bowl which he set on a big plate he then arrived with a huge terrine of soup which he proceeded to ladle into my bowl. I just expected to get 1 ladle full but he kept on going and soon the soup was overflowing the bowl into the plate I had to suggest that he stopped. His generous hospitality at a time of poverty in Spain was demonstrated with overflowing soup. But today it isn't soup we thinking of but God's overflowing grace.

In these 9 verses from 2 Corinthians the word grace appears 5 times as Paul wants us to see what grace looks like in action. Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to give money to the church in Jerusalem which was really poverty stricken. Paul planned to take it back with him.

Paul tells us that the Macedonians gave:

- In a time of great affliction - but gave with abundant joy
- They were in extreme (Rock bottom) poverty - but gave beyond their means
- Gave Voluntarily - and saw their giving as a privilege
- And begged us for the favour (grace) of sharing in the ministry to the saints at Jerusalem. Saints in extreme poverty.

One of the great things was that they gave unexpectedly. Surprising giving is powerful. Thirty years ago when we were struggling rather some friends at church gave us their car – it was a very good car – we were astonished but they were adamant. The theologian Mike Thompson said: When a community stops surprising people, it's stopped living by grace. But it has been good to see charities coming to collect a cheque from here being surprised at the amount.

The Macedonians gave themselves first to Christ and made themselves available as well as their money – they offered to go with Paul to Jerusalem to take the gift. 1000 miles by boat or 2000 miles by horse. That's quite an offering of service. So today as we think about God's overflowing grace we also think about how we give ourselves.

Similarly the Good Samaritan overflows with care for someone who hates him. The priest would have been riding a horse and probably the Levite too. The Samaritan had to take a huge risk taking an injured Jewish traveller on his horse to an inn which would have been in Jericho. He risked attack by the Jewish community. He had the greatest reason to do nothing. But he was generous in caring and with his money. Giving is at the heart of God and he invites us to join in.

When we know the greatness of the overflowing grace and riches of God that empowers us to give our time and money. Jim Elliott, an American missionary martyred in 1950 in Ecuador said ' They are no fools who give what they cannot keep to gain what they cannot lose'

After the introduction to Giving in the Giving for Life booklet we have handed out today, we summarised our giving programme, so next week Mike Cox will be covering generous giving and we then we have summarised some of the passages for you.

Then we tried to distil the 2013 church accounts. Just looking at the centre we see two pie charts our income and our expenditure. Our accounts are rather more complicated than other churches and we are grateful to our treasurers, PCC and others who work hard keeping things in order. About 45% (Just less than half) comes from voluntary giving which makes up almost £100k. A further £119k comes from property rental and use of church rooms and car park. Values can go up as well as down. And we are very grateful to the generosity of past generations. Since the war people have worked hard to rebuild the church, raise money for rooms and organ. People made great sacrifices of time and money. They had a vision for worshipping God in this town. David Elvin has found some fascinating pictures of an ever changing church before the war as people in past eras made huge changes rebuilding the church time and again to make it right for their time. We in this day are inspired to follow their lead in trying to ensure the church best meets the needs of our parish in our generation.

When we look at our expenses first we have responded to God's grace by 10% of our expenditures being Away Giving to charities. Clearly in 2013 our outgoings were higher than our income. This year our mission initiatives have included a new children and families worker, 4 choral scholarships and the new website. We will have less repairs on our properties but probably more maintenance costs on our rooms and church. Our planned giving or 'Fairshares' income has been falling slightly in recent years mostly due to some generous donors dying or moving away. Looking forward we estimate that increasing our voluntary income by 20% or £20,000 is a good target a 20:20 vision for this year. Clearly that might include having more givers as well as some increasing their donations.

- What can we do? Well in the booklet I have included a pink form which includes some of the opportunities to be involved in God's work here. Over the coming weeks we would like you to use that to indicate any areas in which you might be interested and put it in the pink post box or give it to Anne /wardens. The other white card is for reviewing our giving to BPC. If you can prayerfully complete that and put that during the next 3 weeks in the blue box for David Rycroft who looks after our fair shares planned giving.
- First Give thanks
- Give generously – The Church of England has proposed a level of 5% is a good target. For some that is too much for others it is not enough.
- Give regularly – so many give through our fair shares scheme using envelopes, bankers orders or regular electronic banking payments and Gift Aid their donations which adds another ¼ to their gifts from Tax
- Give ourselves

So today we have thought about all the God gives to us in his son and his overflowing grace. And our 20:20 vision target. "But just as you excel in everything see to it that you excel or overflow in this grace of giving.