

## Ministry Musings (19<sup>th</sup> March 2017)

response of the disciples when they returned from their shopping! You would have expected them to be appalled ~ to challenge the breach in etiquette and cultural norms but they didn't ~ they were learning generosity too!

In chapter three of Dethroning Mammon Archbishop Justin talks of "what we have we hold" and challenges us about generosity. He gives us further examples of generosity found in our Bible. Mary and the anointing of our Lord's feet with costly perfume. And the man who secures the pearl of great value. Both give sacrificially to be generous.

So back to those three questions I asked you to ask of yourself this morning. Hopefully each scored the same amount on the scale of 1 to 10 or were quite close in their scores..... God shows us generosity so that we in turn can be generous and eventually can be generous without stopping to work out what it is costing us ~ we know that there will be a cost but we don't get anxious about it or calculate what we will receive in return ~ we simply trust that God will meet our generosity with His!

Sometimes being generous requires us to break the rules of worldly or cultural expectation ~ not to be bound by what is expected of us by our family, friends or work colleagues but to step beyond those expectations to show God's love.

What opportunities is God giving you to show generosity?

Sometimes an act or commitment made today will be called in when you have almost forgotten you made it! I had one such example or experience this weekend. ~ There have been boxes sat in my study for the past three years ~ they contained household items from clearing a friend's mum's house and I had promised to hold on to them in case one of my relatives needed them. You would not believe the times I have nearly fallen over those boxes and had it in mind to get rid of them ~ but I got a message in the middle of the week and the boxes have now been collected and anything that can be will be used. The message asked "Do you still have those boxes and if so is it alright if I come and get them ..... "What impression of God's generosity would it have given if my response had been "No, I'd given up on you needing them! " ? So when in your life do you recognise that in **knowing Jesus** you can **make Him known**?

In the past I have challenged you to look around your home and be honest about how much you hoard or place so much value on that you would never part with. The things that have a sentimental attachment that means you would be upset if they were broken or lost let alone given away but also those things that you just keep because somehow they give you a sense of security!

My lovely Grandad used to say to us grandchildren ~ "what's mine is mine and what's yours is mine too" It was always said in jest and was a twist on the saying "What's mine is yours and what's yours is mine" which is an expression of generosity and sharing. We always knew that he had deliberately got the saying wrong to tease us and we would always be given a treat at the end of the teasing! But reflecting on that it taught us just what a fine line there is between selfishness and sacrificial generosity!

In Dethroning Mammon, Archbishop Justin tackles the issue of "What we have we hold" in chapter 3. He challenges us to look again at the generosity of the woman (Mary) anointing Jesus and the sacrifice of the man who had to give up all he had to gain the pearl of great value. Mammon sells us the deception that scarcity compels us to hold on to what we have, worse to hunt out that which is scarce and collect it! What do we do when we are told there is a national shortage of anything? Most recently it was courgettes and all of a sudden they seemed to be the vegetable that everyone wanted! Do you remember the petrol shortage or the months of power cuts and how we craved what was removed from us?

As Christians we are challenged to break the rules ~ Mary broke every rule of convention of her day and Jesus praised her for it ~ why? Because Mary sees through the eyes of God.

Our readings today encourage us to challenge convention because of our faith and trust in God ~ Moses struck the rock of Horeb and water sprang from it (mammon had the people craving for water that was not available). Faith enables us to recognise the deceits of mammon and not be taken in by them ~ it gives us a heart of generosity not selfishness ~ I challenge you again to look at all you have and why you hold on to it when perhaps you should give it away! Faith reveals to us the true nature of our God who gives us His love to share as in **knowing Jesus** ~ we are **making Him known** !

Exodus 17:1-7 OT page 66  
Romans 5:1-11 NT page 151  
John 4:5-42 NT page 91

Ask yourself these questions ~ don't dwell on working out the answers ~ and I am not going to ask you to share them (unless you feel you want to!)

(On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is reluctant and 10 is enthusiastic)

On a scale of 1 to 10 how generous would you say that you are?

On a scale of 1 to 10 how easy do you find it to give things away or to declutter?

On a scale of 1 to 10 how good are you at sacrificial giving?

Now remember the three answers that you settled on ~

We are told in Exodus that the whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin ~ they were changing their corrupt ways ~ and they were travelling from place to place as the Lord commanded. God has them on a pilgrimage of faith ~ at each destination of their journey they learnt something, sometimes they even learnt something en route! The journey was a slow progress and they often got dispirited and impatient. ~ This morning we hear that they faced a drought and there was no water for them to drink ~ so instead of going searching the possible springs or digging a well they quarrelled with Moses and demanded "Give us a drink"!

You and I tend to be like that with our faith ~ we start out with enthusiasm and determination but we weary and find reason to doubt that we should have started ~ we want results and want to drench ourselves in God's Love when even the smallest sip would satisfy our thirst. We want to run before we can walk and at those times our old habits and the worldly enticements get in the way and threaten to engulf us again.

Moses despairs ~ he longs for his people to walk with God and to recognise His presence in their lives but they have no patience with the strength of his faith and would even destroy him rather than see clearly what he is trying to make known to them! Moses cries out to the Lord who responds by giving Moses instructions to go to the rock of Horeb and strike it with his staff to produce water. Moses obeys and the people drink. Note Moses not only obeys God but praises Him for

His generosity. But who is being generous? Certainly God was generous, but what about Moses? What about the Israelites?

Would you agree that the Israelites felt their generosity had been in following Moses in the first place. That Moses sought God's intervention when he realised his generosity was running dry?

God used the people's frustration to teach them of His generosity ~ He provided refreshing water from an impossible source to show that He the Lord was among them when they doubted.

Ask yourself did the people recognise that generosity and respond by being generous or did they just take it for granted?

Our epistle reminds us firmly that we have Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. How often do we need reminding? Reminding that we stand in grace which we have gained through Christ because of God's Love for us? And even if we don't need reminding often do we use the Holy Spirit in our lives as we could? God has been generous to each of us and will be generous to anyone who comes to Him through His Son, because of the work of the Spirit in their lives ~ but if we don't live our lives as if we believe that how can others see it for themselves and respond? How generous are we with our faith?

And then we are given the example of generosity in our gospel of St. John. We are told of Jesus' journey through Samaria, (a place that most Jews would avoid travelling through, so Jesus has gone out of His way). He goes to the town called Sychar where Jacob's Well stands and He sits by the well to rest a while. We are told that it was about noon ~ so in the heat of the day. The disciples have gone into the town to buy food so he is alone as a Samaritan woman comes to draw water and he asks her if she will give Him a drink. She recognises Jesus as a Jew but not as Jesus and she questions how He can request anything from her as their cultures do not associate with each other. Jesus talks to her of being able to give her Living water if she could ask Him for it ~ but she does not understand and thinks in practical terms of drawing water and the equipment needed to do so! There follows a discord during which Jesus reveals who He is and the woman recognises Him for who he is and comes to faith for herself. God's generosity at work at many levels.

What took place at the well was healing at many levels including the