

ST. ANDREW'S, BLACKROCK & BRAY - 30TH MAY 2021

ESSENTIAL QUESTION - WHY SHOULD I GIVE TO THE CHURCH?

"Welcome to our 'Church at Home' transcript for the 30th May 2021. This Sunday we were continuing our series on the theme of what the Bible says about church, looking at why and how we should give." - Rev. Andrew Gill

Call to Worship – Psalm 29:1-5

*Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.*

*Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name;
worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness.*

*The voice of the Lord is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the Lord thunders over the mighty waters.*

*The voice of the Lord is powerful;
the voice of the Lord is majestic.*

Opening Prayer

Almighty and eternal God,
through your Word and Spirit you created all things. In Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, you reveal your salvation in all the world. Through your Holy Spirit, you give us a share in your life and love. Keep us firm in this faith, and fill us with the vision of your glory, that we may serve and praise you all our days. Amen.

Reading - 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in

abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written,

*‘He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;
his righteousness endures for ever.’*

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Sermon - ‘Why should I give to the Church?’

Church has obviously been very different over the last number of months. Even now that we are back, there are still some parts of the normal service that we are unable to do. Every week people come and they say things like, ‘Oh I just miss the singing so much’ or ‘I miss the chat afterwards.’ But so far no one has come to me and said, ‘I really miss I miss the offering when I get to give my money!’

We are doing a series on church, and over the next few weeks we are going to think practically about how we can apply the principles that we have seen so far. And today we are going to start by looking at why and how we should give. I know that preaching on money can sometimes make us feel uncomfortable, but giving has always been an important part of church life. After pentecost, we read in Acts 2:45 that the first church, “*sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.*” And as time went on, one of the key things that made the early church stand out in the pagan world, and

caused it to grow, was their generosity to the poor. Which is not surprising because when you experience the incredible generosity of God then it moves you to be generous to others. But of course sometimes our hearts fall back into that default mode of holding on to what we think is ours. In the New Testament letter of 2 Corinthians, Paul writes to the church because they had not followed through on their pledge to help the Christians suffering, due to a famine in Jerusalem. So in chapters eight and nine the apostle gives them a nudge to remind them of their desire to be generous, and now to actually get out their chequebooks.

I know that St. Andrew's is a very generous church, and my purpose of this sermon is not even to give you a nudge. But like with anything, we have all developed a habit in our giving, and it is also wise to regularly check our practises with what the Bible says. So today we are looking at how the Bible answers the question, *'Why should I give to the church?'* So far in this series we have seen that Church is designed by God, built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, to be the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. And the Church exists to love God, to love others, and to make disciples. And one of the many ways that we can practically love God, love others, and make disciples is by giving.

First and foremost, as Christians we give as a way to worship God. All worship is rooted in a response to who God is, and what he has done for us. God is generous in his nature, and his generosity is perfectly demonstrated through the gospel. Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:9 explains the gospel in these terms; *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich."* We give generously as an act of worship because of the grace that we have received. Giving is also an act of faith, a way to show that we trust God to provide for us and that we are relying on him for the security of our future. Giving is also an act of obedience, and it is a way for us to acknowledge that everything that we have ultimately comes from him. What

we do with our money, perhaps more than anything else, reveals the priorities of our heart. As Jesus says in Matthew 6:21, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

We give as a way to express our love to God, and to show our love to others. There is huge inequality in our society, and in our world. Our love for others must not just be in words and speech, but also in action and in truth. So we give. Through your generosity last year, we as a congregation, and as a denomination, were able practically to show love to the people locally and globally that have been hit the worst by the pandemic. We were able to provide ongoing support services for the elderly, and the mentally and physically disabled. And to help for those that are struggling in a variety of ways both north and south.

We give as a way to love God, to love others, and we give to support our mission to make disciples. As a church we seek to be a witness for Jesus Christ in our community, and I encourage everyone to be a part of that by praying, by serving (which we are going to be thinking about more next week), and by giving. Last week, we were thinking about how the Holy Spirit empowers us as a church for mission. And the truth is, God could do it all by himself. But in his love, he invites us to partner with him in his mission of saving world. He gives to each of us the time, the personality, the gifts, and the financial resources, we need to play our part. When we give we are helping to build God's Kingdom in Blackrock and in Bray.

And as we think about giving in our church, I want to highlight a few things that I think is important to remember and understand. First, giving in our church is transparent. Members get a copy of the accounts each year and you can see how every cent of the money given is spent. Secondly, giving is anonymous. There are a few people that need to know what individuals give for organisation and for tax purposes, but I personally have no idea how much anybody contributes. Also I have no direct contact with the money. As

the minister of the church I do not get paid directly out of the offering. My stipend comes centrally from a fund that the church pays into. That amount is set by the General Assembly and is equal for all ministers in our denomination. So don't be thinking I'm only preaching on this because I've got baby on the way and I want some more offerings on the plate! That's not how it works. Also, I have no direct control over the money. I can't write myself a check from church accounts. Finally, the church committee aims to be good stewards, and seeks to use the money wisely and for the purposes that it is given.

Giving is a form of worshiping, it is a practical way to show compassion, and it supports the mission of the church. That's why we should give. Next let us briefly think about how much we should give. In the Old Testament, the people of God were commanded to offer a tithe, which is 10 percent of their income. And some people say that still applies to the Christian Church. However, I think that all the New Testament says is that we need to be generous. Ten percent is perhaps a good place to start, but the command for us is not to tithe, but to be generous. And let me just mention a few things that Paul advises in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 about practically what generosity looks like. First, in 8:11 he says that we need to give according to our own means. Giving is very specific to the circumstances of each individual household, and we need to give proportionately to our own income. We give according to what we have, not according to what we don't have. But, secondly, there are times when we are called to give beyond our means. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-4 the Macedonian church had made an offering that was sacrificial to themselves. Sometimes there are circumstances when the cause is so important that we need to give out of proportion, but that is not the norm. Our giving should be generous, proportionate, occasionally sacrificial, but always thoughtful. Christian generosity should be planned out. In 2 Corinthians 9:7 Paul says, *"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give."* My aim for this sermon is not for you to have you immediately react, and empty your pockets and give to the church. No, I

want you to take some time to pray, to think, to go over your finances, and if you are married, to talk with your spouse. Then make a decision about how much you are going to give, and then follow through and give it, whether its by weekly envelopes or a monthly standing order, or an annual gift. Finally, and above all, giving should be done cheerfully. I'm not trying to guilt or force anyone to giving. Generosity should be a joy! As the second half of 2 Corinthians 9:7 goes on to say, *"not reluctantly or under compulsion for, God loves a cheerful giver"*

So how do we apply all this? First let me be clear, to those who are visiting us, or who are reading online that are from another church, I am not asking you to give us any money. But I pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you about how you can be generous in your own circumstances. But for the members of our church, and those who consider St. Andrew's to be your home, then I am asking you to give. If you are not in a habit of giving, then I would encourage you to make a start, no matter how small you might think it is. If at the beginning of 2020 or 2021 you had plans to give a certain amount, but due to church being closed you missed some week, and if you are able to, then it would be great to make up the difference. Or if over the last year, you have been able to save, perhaps you might consider increasing your giving or make a one-off gift. But of course, if you have been struggling financially over these last couple of months, then I don't want you to be burdened by any of this, in fact we want to release you from your debts, so please contact me or you elder as there are practical ways that we can help you. But all of us should prayerfully consider how we give, and also how we can live a life of generous worship, compassion, and support of mission.

Closing Prayer

Father God, guide me into living a life of generous worship, love, and giving, for our Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, yet for my sake he became poor, so that I through his poverty might become rich in grace, and abound in every good work. Amen.