

Generosity

Psalm 119¹⁷⁻³²; Isaiah 28¹⁻⁹; 2 Corinthians 8¹⁻⁹

*I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others.
[2 Corinthians 8²]*

Paul isn't playing the game - he is playing one set of Christians off against another! How would it be if the Bishop went round - St Mary's is making more of an effort with their building; St Andrew's is better with families; St Michael's shows greater tenacity; St James's shows greater loyalty. We would be engaged at such comparisons.

Yet Paul write to the Corinthians and says that the Macedonian Church are much better Christians than they are

- **during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part:** joyful as well as generous!
- **They voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means:** caution thrown to the wind for the sake of their Christian commitment.

Back to the flattery: **as you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you** BUT - GIVE!

One of the greatest problems in the Church today is that we are living, in so many ways, on the interest of capital deposited in the past:

- ✦ We still have the status of the Established Church because Elizabeth I enshrined it in law and Charles II used the 1662 Prayer Book as a way to glue society back together again. There were those who were prepared to pay the cost of establishing the faith (even with their lives) yet we hesitate in sharing that faith - either because we are embarrassed or we fear to offend.
- ✦ We have so many freedoms, particularly freedom of speech, but we have become hesitant in case what we have to say doesn't suit the point of view of those who hear. Religious growth is greatest when truth is proclaimed rather than opinions offered.

We could go on through Paul's positive list - but time...

When it comes to generosity, we also have a great deal to learn from the past. The current work on the Church would not be possible were it not for legacies. Neither would our ability to help others, were it not for imaginative giving in the past.

When we get back, look at the benefactors board on the inside wall by the south door. There you will see that Thomas Bromwich left land worth £8 in 1556. Carefully managed, that no allows for c£20,000 each year to be applied to the poor and needy of the ancient Parish of Handsworth.

Unlike Paul, I do not think that shaming works - but encouragement might. Why not be generous to the Church of the future - you can wait until you are dead and leave it as a legacy (and the diary will be open for funerals soon, if you want to book).

Christian giving is never about what we can afford - the money isn't ours: it is our response to God and our responsibility to each other. *Fading is the worldling's pleasure, all his boasted pomp and show; solid joys and lasting treasure none but Zion's children know.*