

Generous?

Deuteronomy 8⁷⁻¹⁸; Psalm 65; 2 Corinthians 9^{6-end}; Luke 12¹⁶⁻³⁰

You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us. [2 Corinthians 9¹¹]

Two questions to hold in our minds for this morning:

- Do you think that you are a generous person?
- Do you think that God is generous?

Harvest is a celebration of God's generosity. It is always tainted by the simple fact that, while God provides enough for everyone in the world to be provided for, 1/10th of the population of the world consumes 9/10ths of the resources. God's generosity is not and cannot be in doubt, whatever other questions are raised.

For those of us in the 1st world the challenge is that Harvest needs to become a celebration of our generosity as a direct and deliberate response to God's grace to us. The problem is that, whilst we want to think we are generous, the truth is more like a charity collection on Union Street, Aberdeen, when so many have short arms and deep pockets!

I confess that, despite the fact I am a Scot, I dislike talking about money, especially from the pulpit. The Church has had too bad a reputation for being obsessed about money – however true that is, that isn't good. If all Christians took their giving seriously I wouldn't be doing spreadsheets to see how close we are to the £1,300 a week we need to stay open, but I would be looking at creative projects for growing the Church and supporting others well beyond our Church walls. But what does Christian generosity look like?

- ✘ It begins when we accept that we have nothing we can keep. God's judgement on the **rich man**, who was struggling to know what to do with his success and who addressed himself saying, **Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry**. God simply says, **you fool!** When he dies the simple question is, **the things you have prepared, whose will they be?**

I suppose I should use this opportunity to prompt legacy giving (to Handsworth St Mary, Birmingham, please – and restricted for the Mission and Ministry of the Church), but it is the reminder that those who won't share what they have will leave it all eventually! Do we use the resources we have for the good of our soul?

- ✘ If there is a competition for generosity, God wins! Deuteronomy reminds the listeners, the Jews, of their heritage. If they have anything now, God provided it; if they have anything positive in their past, God provided it; if they have any hope for the future, God provides it!

The Psalmist reminds us that nature is God's gift – the water, the plants and everything else. *All things bright and beautiful* isn't my favourite hymn, but that message is an important one.

- ✘ Sharing (and doing so joyfully) is our expression of thanksgiving for all that God provides and does. God doesn't need our money, it is given to the work of God as our thank-offering. (Our debt to God is our tithe – 10% of what we receive: giving is what we offer beyond that – a useful benchmark in what generosity looks like.)

Giving is a risk – but it is a very small expression of our faith in God **who supplies seed for the sower and bread for food [he] will supply and multiply** what you need. **You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity.**

My children all know that when we go to the pub I expect that they will buy a round. The clever ones know to jump in first and to be seen to be generous and that this will be rewarded by a human and very fallible father ensuring that they are not out of pocket. It is, of course, noted when they do not!

It isn't ever a risk when we are generous in God's name as our heavenly Father always responds, proud that we follow his example of generosity.

God is generous – no question: are we? We may think that John Wesley was guilty of hyperbole when he said, *If I die with more than a penny to my name I have robbed both God and man!* What would your version be?