

Giving

Numbers 11: 4-6. 10-16, 24-29

James 5:13-20

Mark 9:38-50

There is a profound question that is sometimes asked to which the answer is, very often bacon. The question is What would you most miss if you had to go vegetarian.

The ancient Jews would not, of course, have missed bacon. Its not very kosher. In fact if the record of The Book of Numbers is accurate they would not have missed meat at all They were more inclined towards fish, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. A very healthy diet if not always very social able. They had had plenty of all these in Egypt and they missed them as they travelled through the desert toward the Promised Land. In fact they missed them so much that they complained and wept about it.

I think it is fair to say that the writers of the Old and New Testaments record a very healthy love of food. It is part of the goodness of God. So, in today's psalms, when the writer wants to emphasize how valuable is the law he says that it is even sweeter than honey. There is a similar sentiment in Psalm 4 where we read words spoken to God himself

Thou hast put gladness in my heart,
more than in the time
that their corn and their wine increased.

These two quotations tell us the good things of life are to be valued nearly as much as God himself. And the word nearly is significant. Corn and wine and honey, representatives of all the good things in life, are immensely valuable. But knowledge of God is even more valuable. Both those points matter. There are some Christians, and people of other faiths, who despise material things, who make

out that clothes, food, holidays are to be despised and looked down on. We do not find this belief in the psalms nor in the lifestyle of Jesus who was told off for going to too many parties.

But there are many people, including some Christians, perhaps even ourselves from time to time, who live as if the material things of life were actually more important than God. The psalmist does not believe this. Nor does Jesus who said that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. By this Jesus was suggesting that wealth can be corrupting as it leads us to put our trust in material things rather than God.

This understanding of wealth forms the basis of the Christian celebration of the harvest. We give thanks to God for all his creation: we celebrate the good things of life. And part of the way we give thanks is by giving some of it away, sharing some of it with others.

In this church we put this into practice by giving away a sum equal to one tenth of all our unrestricted income. That amounts to about £4000 every year and is done either through collections among you or from PCC funds.

And of course individual Christians do this as well. WE all share some of our income. And one of the charities that Christians support is their local parish church.

I want to give you three reasons why you might want to do this. First of all, this church exists to promote the Kingdom of God. Through its building, its clergy, its services, it attempts to care for the people of the parish and to show them the love of God.

Second, it has no other reliable source of income other than your giving. Grants are sometimes available for specific activities, such

as children's holiday clubs, or in some cases for specific historical buildings and even, in the case of St Margaret's, for the employment of an outreach worker – but the ordinary day to day work of any church is funded solely by its members. To put that in context, Bradford Street Angels, of which I am the Treasurer, can appeal to about 300,000 people – all the residents of Bradford. St James the Great can appeal to about fifty. And St Margaret to about twenty five. There are many charities worth supporting, but if we do not support this church no-one else will.

And the good news is that we do. But there is a gap. It is probably fair to say that our personal giving should be enough to cover what we pay to the Diocese for the services of half a priest. But we don't. We fall short by £2500 – or £50 per week. The Finance Committee of the Church Council has put together a letter which will be offered to every member of the congregation setting out what we might do. By far the best solution would be if each one of us increased our giving by one tenth. That is to say that for every £10 we give now we give £11 from next week. Regular and planned giving is an important part of the discipline of being a Christian. So you might like to consider that option. But not everyone gives in that way. There are some people who prefer to give to support a particular activity or an item. And so that letter lists a variety of ways you can make a one off donation. It also spells out what it costs to run this church. So you might like to sponsor a care home service at £30 or a session of Big Jims at £75. Perhaps it never occurred to you that these things cost so much. They do so because they are often run by me and I am paid directly by the Diocese but ultimately most of the cost is borne by you. Or if you prefer something more tangible you might buy the next Easter Candle at £50. Or if you are feeling really generous you might wish to find the balance to refurbish the old kitchen at £1000.

The people of St James have a record of responding when they are presented with the facts. It is at one level, a simple practical matter of finance. But more importantly it is a spiritual matter. It is about giving some of the good things God has given us back to God. It is an expression of our thanks.

N Clews

30th September 2018