

## Welcome to Update

*Keeping in touch with God  
and each other.*

*MARCH 2006*

Dear friends

**"For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich."**  
*2 Corinthians 8:9*

This is the truth that generates the community of Jesus. The teaching from chapters 8 & 9 of 2 Corinthians has been terrific. I have dared to summarise 25 principles of giving from these two chapters we have been studying these last four weeks, please let me know if you see more. At the Prayer Night in February someone prayed we might be daring in our giving. I am glad to be in a church that wants to hear God's word, and wants to live it. Nick Jackson's sermon contained some practical application for giving and he has kindly agreed to my request to reproduce it here.

That generosity continues towards the reordering; over 140 have attended surgeries over the last month. That is amazing; more I know are coming to the last surgery on Feb 21st. I am especially grateful that those with most concerns have not only said so with all the disciplines of courtesy in place but also offered ways through to other possible solutions. Please pray as all this is collated, fed back to the church, and the church discerns God's plan. So many have expressed to me their thanks for Sue Wilcox and Bill Johnston steering us through and I gladly add my own.

The scripture from 2 Corinthians might well serve as the basis for meditation as Lent approaches, the Lord's poverty and our riches. One of the blessings I mentioned in February's update was the evening in January when Bishop Colin and Bishop John spoke of the renewing of the diocese. Bishop John's prayer was for every believer in every parish to pray the scriptures every day. He produced six booklets with each booklet containing one verse for each day of the week. He has added a very helpful meditation on each day. These booklets are now available and I want to urge all of us to include them as part of our daily devotion as we pray together through Lent. A small charge of 50p covers the cost of all six booklets, and copies are available at the back of the church with a list for you to sign so we know how many more to produce. He also asks us to use the Swanwick prayer every day, here it is:-

## **SWANWICK PRAYER**

Father, pour out your Spirit upon us,  
grant us a new vision of your glory,  
a new experience of your power,  
a new faithfulness to your word,  
a new consecration to your service,  
that your love may grow among us,  
and your kingdom come:  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen

The theme I am asking us to adopt during Lent is "Life Together"; I have given it as the overall theme of 1 Peter which we will hear on Sundays. There will not be time then or in the small groups to look at every verse so you may want to read it through and take it to heart. Some think 1 Peter was written especially with the preparation of the newly baptised in mind. If that is so then it will be especially relevant to Lent because a number of adults and young people are thinking about baptism and /or confirmation at Easter. The phrase "Life Together" may be familiar to some as the title of a short book by Dietrich Bonhoeffer published in 1939 after the closure by the authorities of the seminary for pastors of the confessing church of Germany. Peter has in mind those whose experience of following Christ is exile, its emphasis is on what kind of community we should be. Some of it will be tough, all of it should instruct; please pray for our life together.

I finish with a plug for the evening of Mark live on March 16th. If you have never heard the gospel from beginning to end you are missing out; please come and invite an agnostic or even atheistic friend to come and hear. The Lord who was rich, for our sakes became poor, so that from his poverty we might become rich.

With love in Him

Keith

PS Congratulations to the choir on their visit to Durham Cathedral to sing Matins and Evensong on February 19th. I'm waiting on report back as I write but I know they will have given glory to God as they sang.

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**Giving at Holy Trinity:  
25 principles from 2 Corinthians 8 & 9.**

- 1 Begins with the grace of God 8v1
- 2 Not prevented by severe ordeals v2
- 3 Expressed in overflowing generosity v2
- 4 Giving according to means and beyond v3
- 5 Begs for privilege of sharing in this ministry v4
- 6 Happens when we give ourselves first to the Lord then to each other v5
- 7 Completes what it begins v6
- 8 Wants to excel in this gift v7
- 9 Is a test of genuineness v8
- 10 Shows we know the generosity of our Lord Jesus Christ v9
- 11 Is motivated by eagerness v11,12,9:1
- 12 Results in equality v13-15.
- 13 Shows the proof of love v24
- 14 Is transparent, face to face v21+24
- 15 Needs ambassadors ("desk" or face to face) v16-19
- 16 Shows Christ's glory in the churches v24
- 17 Can be the subject of proper boasting of others 9:2-3
- 18 Needs organisation to avoid humiliation 9:4-5
- 19 Will reap according to what is sown 9:6,10
- 20 No compulsion, God loves cheerfulness! 9:7
- 21 Enriches the giver 9:11
- 22 Brings thanksgiving to God 9:13,15
- 23 Is a test of obedience 9:13
- 24 Is a testimony to the gospel 9:13
- 25 Binds the church together in longing and prayer 9:14

Read on to see how to give and how your gift gives to others.

Keith Sinclair Vicar

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## **Clusters @ HTC**

*'From Him (Christ) the whole Body joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work'. (Ephesians 4: 16)*

At the beginning of this new year, 2006, I thought it would be a good idea to update you where the church is with small groups, and now Clusters. What are Clusters, many of you might be asking?

At Holy Trinity we encourage every member to be part of a small group which we believe to be central to our Church life. They are groups that meet to worship together, study the bible, pray for one another, enjoy fellowship, and support and encourage one another in their Christian discipleship. These groups provide pastoral support, an opportunity to grow in Christian maturity, to enjoy friendship with other Christians, and to witness the good news of Jesus by having an 'outward focus' such as helping out on Alpha, Meeting Place, hospital visiting, and reaching out to the community in creative ways.

I believe they are supporting ligaments, growing and building people up in love, as each person, and group, does its work for the whole Body of the Church here at Holy Trinity.

We now have thirteen such groups, many in the last two years coming out of Alpha which is very exciting; evidence of God's seeds being sown and fruit beginning to grow.

Last Autumn we decided to gather the small groups into two 'Clusters'. By clustering a number of small groups together it enables a wider amount of fellowship (inward focus), a safe place to exercise one's God given gifts, such as musical gifts, intercessory prayers and praying for one another, leading meditations, giving short talks; prophecy and tongues (upward focus); and a larger amount of people to do mission (outward focus). Last year each cluster met three times; for a time of fellowship (Bar-b-que's), for a time of worship with people exercising gifts that they would, perhaps, feel fearful to exercise in a Sunday service; and a time when one could reach out to non believers, such as inviting friends to firework parties. All events were, I believe, a great blessing.

Clusters also enable better pastoral support for small group leaders as one person pastorally oversees a Cluster. Last year it was my responsibility to pastor both Clusters.

This year, as the small groups have grown, it was felt that another Cluster should be developed, and it was also felt that the task would be too big to oversee three Clusters, if pastoral and prayer support for group leaders was going to be effective. Therefore Keith, Geoff Wilcox, and myself, now have responsibility for one Cluster each.

We are there to support, encourage and pray for our leaders, to visit their groups, and to help the groups put into action Cluster meetings which have an Upward focus (worship), inward focus (fellowship), and outward focus (mission) - in other words

communion, community and mission that Viv Thomas talked about at our Parish Weekend last year.

I think it is very exciting, and already this year one Cluster has met up for a social; and another Cluster is organising an Easter Egg drop to about 600 houses in the parish together with an invitation to all the services going on during Holy Week and Easter day on the evening of Thursday 30th March, and on the evening of Thursday 9th March will be gathering together in the Church Centre to put the eggs and invites together, having a time of fun and fellowship as well. Please pray for all these events.

If you would like to join a small group and be part of a Cluster, helping to build stronger ligaments within the fellowship of the Body of Christ's Church here at Holy Trinity, then please do get in contact with me.

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## **Sermon given by Nick Jackson**

19th Feb 2006

### **Eager to help (Giving).**

*2 Corinthians 9 v1-9*

At the end of a week in which we celebrate St Valentine; 'What makes you cheerful?' Is it that special candlelit meal for two? Or the bunch of flowers that she gave you when you thought you were getting too old for that sort of thing? Or perhaps it's the smile on a grandchild's face? Or success in school or at work? No doubt we can all think of things which make us cheerful, but it's interesting that the word cheerful only comes twice in the New Testament, and both times it has to do with doing things for other people. Here in our passage (v7), we read that 'God loves a cheerful giver'. The Greek word for cheerful is *hilaros* - I'm not sure if it means that God loves an hilarious giver - one who actually chuckles with joy as he gives away his money! The other use of the word cheerful is in Romans 12v8: 'if someone's gift is showing mercy, they should do it cheerfully'. Already we see the truth of the so-called ninth beatitude (Acts 20v35): 'It is more blessed to give than receive.'

But can we really be cheerful as we give away our hard-earned cash? Most of us have at least a faint sense of reluctance, resentment or embarrassment as the collection is announced and the bag comes round. But God loves a cheerful giver! Why? Why is it so important that we enjoy giving and don't do it reluctantly or under compulsion as it says in v7? The answer is my key point in today's talk:

#### **A Cheerful Giver is expressing God's own character**

God loves a cheerful giver because such a person has begun to understand God's Nature, and to demonstrate that his life is being transformed into God's likeness. This is surely what the whole Christian life is about: knowing God and showing His character in our lives. God loves a cheerful giver because He Himself is a cheerful giver. God's nature is to give: He sees a need, His heart is moved with compassion, He takes action to address those needs - and so often this involves giving Himself. And He loves doing it - can we reverently say: He chuckles with joy as He sees His creatures enjoy His gifts and blessings!

As Christians we have received God's loving gifts - especially His Son Jesus and a restored friendship with God. God loves to see that we have truly understood this amazing truth and begun to respond to it! It's like a litmus test of our Christian life: if we are a Christian, then we are linked to God through Christ and our life must begin to change to reflect His character. In v8, Paul is talking about the nature of God: 'He is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance ...' And so it seems v9 also refers to God: 'He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor: his righteousness endures forever'. Actually v9 is a quote from Ps 112 which is talking about generous god-fearing people: Ps112 v1,3-5,9. So the generous giver is held up as a picture of our bountiful God!

This helps us to get our motivation right when it comes to giving. If we are not careful, we will give out of a sense of guilt, or give money to relieve us of the need to give our other talents, time or energy. We can even fall into the trap of giving to gain respect and status within a church. But our giving should be a joy because it is an expression of the growing development of God's nature and character within us. Yes - God living in me!

So, what else might follow from this truth - that our giving is a reflection of God's own character? I have two applications from this about our giving:

### **1. Our Giving should be Generous.**

The translation of this passage uses the word, 'bountiful': a word that always makes me think of Pacific islands or chocolate-covered coconut sweets! But the idea is one of giving generously, or liberally (v6). The world would persuade us to give sparingly, to make sure that we have enough for all our own needs and desires; to look after No 1 and only give from our spare petty cash. But is our God like that? No - indeed He is amazingly generous in all His dealings with us. As Paul wrote to the Romans (8v32): 'He .. did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all'. Or to Timothy he wrote (1Tim 6v17): 'God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment'. And of course, we have seen how Paul has been trying in these two chapters of this letter to the Corinthians to goad them into action by reminding them how generous the Macedonians have been despite their severe poverty. So we are told to be generous in our giving. And generous means costly and sacrificial. It hurt the Macedonians to give when they themselves were poor, and it will cost us too if we are to reflect God's character in our giving. The World may think this is absurd - even hilarious - for us to go without something in order to provide financially for God's work. I am loathe to suggest rules for our giving - indeed Paul says in v7 that each of us should make up our own mind. But undoubtedly if our giving does not cost us significantly in terms of doing without something, then we probably aren't giving enough. This may mean living below the normal standard of living for someone in our financial position: a smaller house, an older car, or less expensive holidays.

As we talk about the re-ordering of the inside of this church, I am reminded about the re-ordering of a central London church - All Soul's Langham Place - some 35 years ago. The church was growing and the building was old, unsuitable and inadequate for its needs. A refurbishment plan was drawn up including creating another whole floor under the church and putting in meeting rooms and offices, and restoring a gallery in the main meeting space, as well as many other structural repairs. I am not sure of the exact cost, but it would have been many millions at today's prices. How was the church to pay for it? Well, the money was largely raised from the members of the church itself. I heard that there were many instances of very generous and sacrificial giving to make this project possible. Young couples gave up their savings and so had to delay buying somewhere to live, elderly people gave their retirement 'nest eggs', middle-aged working people dug deep into their savings and income and so on. People gave generously and the project was completed: All Soul's became one of the most important centres of Christian teaching and leadership within the Anglican Church in the second half of the twentieth century. We ourselves have been hearing about the plans and ideas for re-ordering the inside of this church building. It is very exciting, but however the plans are drawn finally, one thing is certain - it is going to cost a lot of money. I don't know whether we can expect any financial help from grant-making bodies, but I am sure we will need to raise much of this money ourselves. If we want to see God glorified in a beautiful building, which is suitable for the needs of the 21st century, then it is going to need us all to be generous and sacrificial in our giving.

But given that it should be generous, how should we give? Does God give us an example to follow here?

## 2. Our Giving should be organised

That is, we should try to plan our giving and carry through those plans. Perhaps it is stretching the parallel a bit far, but I believe that just as our God is a God who plans His generous giving in advance, so should we. We are told that God devised His plan of salvation 'before the creation of the world'. He saw the situation of His creatures far ahead, planned His response and persistently and patiently implemented His loving plan of salvation. Perhaps we don't need to be quite so far ahead in the planning of our giving! But giving should involve our mind as well as our heart. (This may come more naturally to those of us who are classified as 'planners' rather than 'spontaneous' personality types in the Myers-Briggs analysis). Yes our heart is important - prompting our generous, spontaneous, cheerful response of thanks to God for His blessings, or to some desperately needy situation. But it is also important to use our minds. V7: 'Each of you must give as you have made up your mind'. I believe that our Lord would have us think carefully about our giving. So we should try to plan ahead and think through such issues as: how much, to what, when, how often, and whether we give using cash, envelope systems or bank standing orders.

Speaking for myself, planned giving can be less painful. If we make sure the money is given at the start of each week or month, when we receive our income, it's done. Then we know what is left to spend on the necessities of life, though of course it is still to be used in a way that honours God and isn't wasteful or greedy. Many of us know what our income is going to be a year ahead, whether that is salary, pension, benefit or student loan. Some will receive an annual increment or at least an inflation-linked rise in April. Thus for many of us, February or March is a good time to sit down prayerfully and review our finances for the coming year. We will be able to weigh up our expected income and expenses, special events in the year, and of course the increasing needs of those projects we support through our giving. We can decide before God how much we can keep and what we should give directly back to God for His work. We can apportion our giving between the various needs that God lays on our hearts: the local church, local ministries and mission, international mission, poverty relief and development. Some of us will have particular individuals or organisations that we support. So that's the planning done. But if we are to follow God's example, we have to take steps to see that the plan is implemented through the year. This seems to be where the Corinthians were in danger of falling down. They had been eager; they had planned to give generously; but they hadn't actually collected the money together and sent it off! So we too must actually give the money we plan to give! We need to contact the bank and set up or increase our standing orders; or contact the church treasurer to ask for our pack of giving envelopes for the year, and fill in the Gift Aid forms if we pay income tax. So, giving may then go on all year without us doing very much more. But of course, this doesn't mean we should shut out giving from our minds - we should also enjoy responding spontaneously and cheerfully if and when a need arises during the year.

Finally I want to touch briefly on a tricky question that is perhaps in your minds: **How much should I give?** Well, as Paul says - we should give as we have made up our mind. It is a question to sort out in prayer before God. I do not want to leave you with a fixed law of giving, or impose a burden of guilt! Our giving should not be a matter of compulsion! But some of us like to have guidance in this area, and I am very grateful to those who were willing to teach clearly on this subject when I was first a Christian.

So what guidance is there? I was interested to read in some of the literature connected with the 'Make Poverty History' campaign that everyone is encouraged to give 0.7% of their income to alleviating poverty. Considered revolutionary, but this hardly seems challenging! Of course, we have the OT Jewish model - the tithe - they had to give every 10th animal in their flocks to God (Lev 27v32), or 10% of the yield of their crops (Deut 14v22). Jesus was a devout Jew and He would probably have followed this rule, though He criticised the Pharisees for being legalistic about this - for tithing their herbs and spices while forgetting more important things like justice and mercy. But Jesus also commended the widow who gave two small copper coins (2pence?) - which was all she had to live on (Luke 21v2). So we have models ranging from 0.7% to 100%! The truth is that our giving should be related in some way to our income. As Paul said in his earlier letter to the Corinthians, 'on the first day of the week, each of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income' (1 Cor 16v2). You must decide what proportion to give! And you can decide that interesting question as to whether to make that a proportion of your income before or after tax!

Even for those of you in financial difficulties yourselves, can I suggest that an sit-down before the Lord to plan your finances might be very helpful? As well as your money, you can also offer Him generously of your time, talents and energy.

I will share my own personal testimony of giving, though not to set myself up as a great example to follow, as I feel I have failed even to live up to my own standards. When I was a young Christian at school, as I said, I was given clear teaching on this subject: Christians should not give less than their OT forebears, and should aim to give a minimum of a tenth of their income directly to God's work, with the proviso that it might be appropriate to make additional thanksgiving gifts for special needs from time to time. For some reason I found this guidance easier to follow in the earlier days than I did later. When I was on a schoolboy allowance and then on a student grant, I did keep to the 10% suggestion, sitting down at the beginning of each year to plan how I would do it. This continued through the early years of salary earning and housebuying, until ... we had children. As some of you will know, at this point in ones life, one experiences a marked drop in income and rise in expenses! I like to feel I sorted this out with God in a prayerful and spiritual way (!), but our giving did drop well below 10% for many years. I am not proud of that fact! The expenses don't seem to have dropped much recently (our children are still all teenagers), but God and the new doctor's contract have enabled us to get back to giving about 10% of our income in the last couple of years. But in a sense I am not proud of that either. Let me just finish with the example of John Wesley. I quote from a wonderful book by J Oswald Sanders called 'Problems of Christian Discipleship'.

'When income increases, the Tempter encourages a proportionate increase in the standard of living which swallows up the increase and no more is available for giving than before. It was far different with John Wesley. When earning £30 a year he lived on £26, and gave £4 to God. When his income doubled, he continued to live on £26 but gave £34 to the Lord. Little wonder that God entrusted him in such abundant measure with the true spiritual riches.'

So our cheerful and generous giving is a chance to enter into the very heart of God. It shows how much we have understood and experienced of God's loving, generous

and carefully planned giving to us. And He will bless us abundantly as we try to commit this area of our life to Him.

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