



GIVING FOR LIFE

EXAMPLE SERMONS

Prepared by the Giving and Resources Group

Introduction

The purpose of this brief booklet is not to tell you how to give a sermon on giving or what to say but simply to share with you the efforts of others who have, like you, needed to speak with and engage their congregations on the importance of financial giving and the impact it can have on the life and vitality of both the Church and personal discipleship.

We offer you four different sermons, from four different ministers for four different contexts. They do not claim to be perfect and they will not directly translate to you and your congregation. However we think they are very good and all four:

- are “real” examples of sermons on giving that were delivered to “real” congregations and
- had a significant impact on giving in the context in which they were delivered.

We are very grateful to the Rev’d Christopher Bryan, the Rev’d John Witcombe, Rev’d Aidan Platten and Bishop John, for being generous with their experience and opening themselves to your critique.

We hope their generosity provides you with stimulation to help you develop your message for your congregation.

EXAMPLE I

Kindly provided by:

The Rev'd Christopher Bryan,
preached at Lechlade

In our house we have lots of these: charity pens. You know the questionnaire wheeze, where you get a free pen? Then you fill in a few questions – to help them with their research: ‘Do you believe small children should go hungry?’ Well, no one’s going to say yes to that one. ‘Do you feel rich people in the West should be able to help them out?’ Er, yes. ‘How would you feel then about making a donation?’ Gotcha! There are so many different ways charities use to try and get people to make donations.

Maybe they shock us with horrible stories. Or they appeal to a sense of guilt - ‘if you don’t help who else will?’ said one letter. An elderly member of my family once received a t-shirt from an animal charity. Emotional blackmail, in effect it said: ‘we’ve given you a T shirt; you should give us something in return.’ That one made me angry.

It’s easy to criticise, but I suppose they have to raise money somehow. Bills come in, work needs to be done. It’s similar in the church. Services, pastoral care, mission – all have a cost. Today marks the beginning of our stewardship campaign, and I’m going to preach on Christian giving. Not an easy subject! I hope that we as a church don’t use any of those manipulative methods. You should all have received material from the PCC. I think it just sets out the facts and asks people to pray about it. Because that’s all the PCC can do. I feel that when you’re open and honest people respect it.

I hope that the church will set a good example in asking and in giving. I hope that we’ll live out Christian teaching, as St. Paul gives it in our New Testament reading. Here, in 2 Corinthians 9, page 180 we find out how the Apostle Paul went about it. The background here is that the Jerusalem church was hit by famine. Paul wants to organise a whip round. He writes to the church in Corinth asking for help. So, his letter is written for specific circumstances at a particular time, but it does give us a real insight into a Biblical pattern of giving, and helps us to look at the way we give.

The first thing Paul says is that giving is a privilege. In chapter 8, verse 9...We give to God because he first gave to us. The whole Bible describes what God has done for us. He created humanity, he gave us a wonderful world to live in. When we sinned he did not give up on us, but sent Jesus to show the way, to become a poor human and to die for our sins. God then sent his Holy Spirit to stay with us, strengthen us for life, and make us part of the church. God has done so much for us. What we give, we give back to him.

You know the prayer at the offertory? It sums it up so well:

‘Yours Lord is the greatness, the power, the glory, the splendour and the majesty. All things come from you O Lord, and of your own do we give you.’ God has given us life’s blessings, he has made us stewards of them, and we use our time, talents and money for his service.

And it is a privilege to give to something we believe in. When Chantal and I moved into the Vicarage our parents were such a tremendous help. They really seemed to enjoy the backbreaking work of moving house, the heavy labour of digging the garden. It was a joy to them to help out. Perhaps in a similar way grandparents might set up a trust fund for their grandchildren, or a keen golfer might endow his club. If we care about the object, giving can be a real privilege. It is good to give to something close to your heart. It fosters a personal attachment. You can see the difference it makes.

So if you want to know more about what our church does with your giving, then please come to one of the information evenings. Over a glass of wine, Rob will explain what exactly is needed and why. For every penny makes a difference to this parish.

Therefore one motive for giving is that it is a gift to be able to give and support what you believe in. We now move on to the method and the means.

I find it very interesting that Paul gives no guidance whatsoever on how much to give. He could have said 'we need five hundred drachmas, and that works out at one each'. Or, a gift of five shekels will keep a family of four for a week. He could have appealed to the Biblical principle of the tithe 'Give 10% or another fixed proportion of your income'. He could have used the precedent of the Jewish temple tax which was a fixed rate per person. Instead he writes 9.v7:

What you and I give should be free, willing given, thoughtfully and prayerfully decided upon. There's nothing wrong with suggesting figures or budgets. Often people find it helpful – that's why there's a giving table in our leaflet. But it's only there as a guide. Some will be able to give much more than this. And will want to. Others rather less. Whatever each one decides is between them and God, for only them to know.

For St. Paul emphasises the freedom and the responsibility of giving. It is up to you in informed prayer with God. He also teaches that we should plan it: in 1st Corinthians 16:2. Very specific advice for his congregation, but a clear principle for us. With all the appeals for help we get, it's so easy to respond in an haphazard way – a bit here, a bit there, something when we feel guilty. Better by far is to plan it prayerfully, and to give regularly. That way both you and the charity know where you stand.

Remember this, in chapter 8.v.12. Remember the widow's mite? The poor woman who dropped a couple of coins into the temple treasury, and, according to Jesus, gave more than the wealthy tipping in floods of gold. Often we find that the poor are the most generous, they are the ones who give sacrificially.

That spirit of willing generosity, of cheerful sacrifice even, is the measure of the true value in God's eyes. What does it actually mean to us to give? What does it cost us? Is our giving to God's work a priority or an afterthought? Is it a grateful gift to God, or a subscription?

To sum up so far: when we look at our Christian giving we should certainly plan it, pray about it and give according to our conscience and our generosity.

So we've had the motive, the means and the method. Finally, the Bible teaches us that giving multiplies blessings. Paul writes in chapter 9 verse 6...it's a simple principle of the virtuous circle. A farmer in those days cast seed by hand. A miserly approach to conserving seed would only result in a thin crop. Generosity with the seed would bear much fruit.

In the same way, says Paul, those who are generous with the gifts of life will themselves be blessed further. Generosity with our time and talents and money does bring a spiritual reward. Giving brings friendship, graciousness results in thanksgiving, one good turn deserves another.

The generosity of the Corinthian church will result in prayers of thanksgiving and intercession from those they have helped. There will be a kind of spiritual feedback, they'll be drawn closer together, so that those who gave will not be poorer as a result but richer. Indeed, v.10+11. There is a promise that those who are generous will never lack something to be generous with. It's not the prosperity gospel - just an appeal to God's faithfulness.

For God is the ultimate giver. If we are generous with what we have, we understand more of his generous heart. Our Heavenly Father is not miserly. He showers his blessings on all. Just look around you, at the beauty and bounty of creation, remember his love for humanity in sending Christ, think of his care and provision in your life. And let us be generous in serving our generous Lord.

Amen.

EXAMPLE 2

Kindly provided by:

The Rev'd John Witcombe,
preached at Uxbridge

Introductory music: Monty Python's Money Song (*look it up on YouTube!*)

Do you remember when you first fell in love?

What did you want to do? (Not that! – well perhaps even that!) You wanted to give – to give everything. To spend, recklessly, on flowers, bits of gold, meals out – whatever. It was a way of expressing the emotion churning there inside you!

No? Well – just imagine you felt as strongly as that for a minute. This is how it's put in the marriage service, at the exchange of rings:

“With my body I honour you, all that I am I give to you, and all that I have I share with you”. Marriage is a mutual commitment of trust – of self giving, to one another and to the partnership.

This is a sermon about giving.

Groan!!

Giving is such a drag, and it makes us feel uncomfortable. Someone at the back has just got their finances sorted out, and worked out that they can get the BMW after all ... and now here's the Team Rector about to lay a guilt trip on you!

Well, wait a minute – did I say who's giving this sermon was about? (Phew – he's talking about somebody else ...)

Let's start with God.

Mo (my wife) used to have a card on her wall in college, where we lived next door to each other – before we were married. It was in some ways a little simple, but I have never quite been able to forget it. It ran like this. I said to God, “How much do you love me?” He said, “This much” – and he stretched out his arms, and died.

God has given everything – and gives us, everything. There's a lovely line in 'The Life of Brian', where a would be rebel says, "What have the Romans ever given us?" – someone at the back of the crowd says 'roads' – apart from roads, what have the Romans ever given us – hospitals – apart from roads and hospitals, what have the Romans ever given us – currency – education – theatre ...

We can be like this with God. What has God ever given us? ... let's pause in silence for a moment ...

Let's ask another one: what part has the church played in us realising what God has given us – and helping us to receive it? (*Pause again for reflection*).

There was a rich man. He had everything he could want. He had two BMW's, and a Porsche. And a vintage steam roller, and a glass garage so everyone could see them. He was a nightmare to buy presents for. He had everything money could buy. He was known the world over for his expertise in pearls – his judgment was second to none in the pearl market. If you wanted the best, you went to him.

He searched the world for the most beautiful pearls, with the finest sheen on them. With the most subtle colours. One day, when he was in a little fishing village, one of the children told him of a pearl so fine it had been hidden, like a secret, for many years by the elders of the village. They knew of its value, and would not part with it to any except someone who would treasure it. He was taken by secret ways to see this treasure.

When he saw it, and held it in his hand, he knew this was perfection – it exceeded all that he had ever known or seen. He begged for it – he who never had to beg for anything. The elders saw the value which the rich man placed upon the pearl, and said to him – you may have the pearl – but it will cost you all you have. You must leave it all, and become the keeper of this great treasure. Such was the beauty and value of the pearl that the rich man agreed.

What is the value of all that God offers to you? (To me) Is it worth this much – THIS MUCH ... how much is it worth. God offers it to you – but he doesn't offer it to you as well as everything else you have, but instead of it.

Jesus says – you must respond to the Kingdom of God like this – give up everything.

I know Christians who have done this. Throwing their lives upon God, they throw away all their old securities. (Joke from last year – the child who had to open his hand to take something else, we have to open our hands, let go of what we grasp, to grasp God.)

How?

From all that I've said, you may see that the question is not so much, how little can I get away with giving, but how much??

We want to give everything – but we need limits!

Am I right – have I convinced you?

Have I? Well - one more example: visiting friends in Northampton recently I came off the motorway by Althorp. It reminded me that when Princess Diana died, I went to Kensington Palace. I wanted to do something to deal with what was going on inside. Like lots of us, I still don't understand exactly why we all felt so strongly – but we needed to do something. Many people wanted to do something which was of value. Many spent large sums of money on flowers – it seems a huge waste – but it was a way of marking the value which Diana had for them. At home, we lit candles for the lanterns which we had – and I used matches which I've had in a book since I worked in New York. I had to do something or use something which mattered to me!

The whole principle behind giving in the Bible is to do something which matters. In the Bible giving is not to pay the bills – well it is,

but that is not the primary motivation. The main reason to give is to show how much God matters to us! At certain times, like the period when Deuteronomy was written – the tithe was used (wasted, if you like) to have a huge party once a year – and then only every third year it was put aside for the needy! The important thing was giving - the use of the money was secondary.

The principle of the tithe comes in to offer middle ground between doing something which matters to you, and doing too much! It's to lift you up to the right level of giving if you need lifting, and to hold you down, if you tend to over exuberance – not very Anglican, probably.

Often we need some guidance in our lives – like, how much should I pray. The tithe is the principle suggested in the Bible – it means a tenth. Many people these days find that a bit hard, and take a different proportion of their income – sometimes 5% rather than 10% (that's a twentieth). Giving a proportion, before we use our money for anything else, is the best way to do our giving. If we earn more, it means we give more. If our income drops, we adjust what we give. But the tithe is the first thing to go out. Mine goes out, principally by standing orders, some to the church and some to other charities which we support. If people ask how to split it, I usually suggest about half and half between the local church and other charities.

I know that by doing this, I'm putting God first in my life where it counts. Sometimes, I don't feel very spiritual. Sometimes, I don't feel like putting God first. But I know, that if that giving is there, that I am keeping up my partnership with God where it counts – and that gives me a huge confidence in God. I know I'm pursuing my relationship with him. Paying and Praying, if you like.

For some of you, this idea of giving because it's good for us, and nothing to do with the bills, will all sound about too much like a clergyman – without his feet on the ground! Well, if that's the case, let me just give you a few facts and figures.

[In this parish, we have a number of costs. We have the running costs of our buildings: the gas bill, the electricity bill, the water rates, the insurance. Together, these come to several thousand pounds. We get no help with these – from the government, the council, the Church of England. We get no preferential rates because we are a church. We have the costs of our services: the books, the candles – the wine and the bread for communion. We get no help with these. We have the costs of the parish office – we try to keep these down as far as possible, but to maintain the organisation and our communication within and beyond the parish would be impossible without it. We get no help with these. You will see them described in the charts at the back of the parish stewardship booklet. We have three clergy – not an excessive number in a parish with the ministry of ours here. Until recently it was 5 or even 6. Payment for the clergy – wages, housing, training, and central diocesan administration – is now charged from the diocese to each parish, and has been for a number of years. The actual cost is reduced by only £5000 per parish from the historic resources of the church – and even that amount is being eroded year by year. What the diocese charges to the Parish is called Common Fund, and it forms the largest part of our expenditure – around 50% in both churches. Over £50,000 this year, due to rise by £20k in the next 3 years.]

How can we pay? Through regular, committed giving. Our bills come in regularly through the year. Our income needs to come in regularly as well. Social events are ok – but they are not a substitute for committed giving.

It's a challenge to us – but if what we do here is worthwhile, it's worthwhile giving to. If we are to provide ministry both for ourselves and for others in the parish, to extend the ministry of the church, we need to pay for it.

Our giving lifted after last year's stewardship campaign – we need to see the same response again this year. And for some years to come to lift us to paying our way within the Diocese and Deanery. It's possible!! If everyone increased their giving by £1 per week, £4 per

month, we'd hit our target. That doesn't sound too bad, does it. But if we can move above that target, then we can really begin to secure our own spiritual lives, and the future ministry of this church.

What am I asking of you?

If you are not in the planned giving scheme, please join. If you are, please examine your giving, decide what proportion of your income you would like to give, and how to work that out (before or after tax, and mortgage). Is your giving reflecting the proportion you have decided to give?

Recognise also where else your giving is going. Several of you are joining the parish weekend – I don't know if this quite counts as the 'use your tithe to party' principle Deuteronomy suggests – but it certainly comes close. If you are already giving generously, make sure you're not actually getting out of hand with what you are giving. It may not be a common problem – but it does exist!

Shirley/Laurie will explain the practicalities of the forms in a moment.

God has great things to do in this parish. He can and will only do it in co-operation with us, his people. He has great things to do in our lives – but he works in partnership with us, not in spite of us or instead of us. Our partnership with him is shown, particularly, in our giving. Will you join with me, and members of your church council, in committing yourself to the principle of proportionate giving, accepting the tithe as the normative guideline, so that God's kingdom can be extended here?

[Prayer.]

EXAMPLE 3

Kindly provided by:

The Rt Rev'd John Went, Bishop of Tewkesbury

A time of recession could be viewed in purely negative terms; many have suffered considerable hardship; redundancy or the loss of a home are immensely difficult experiences. Yet such a time can be a time for taking stock, calling into question the values of an acquisitive consumer society, values so easily simply taken for granted. The paying of enormous bonuses in the city can lead us to assume that the acquiring of wealth is a perfectly good end in itself. Jesus in his teaching constantly confronts us with values that question the values embraced by society at large. Jesus talks about storing up, accumulating treasure in heaven. It's all a matter of how we use what wealth, whether great or small, we have been entrusted with.

St Paul devotes two chapters of his second letter to the young Christian church in Corinth to Christian giving. Christians in Jerusalem have been facing a time of great financial hardship following on a serious famine. St Paul organised a collection among the churches he had links with as a missionary in order to provide practical help and support for those struggling financially in the Mother Church in Jerusalem.

In his first letter he had laid out a clear principle: on the first day of the week each of you is to put aside whatever he can afford; a principle of making giving as a Christian a priority. Christian giving is never to be giving our "left overs" to God, what is left, if anything, when we've provided for all our own needs. A responsible attitude towards giving as a Christian will involve prayerfully spending time reflecting on what is an appropriate proportion of our income to set aside for God's work and helping others before spending on ourselves. In the OT the tithe, 10%, was given to maintain the Temple, its worship and the priests who served the Temple. In addition God's people were to give generously to the poor and vulnerable in the community. The NT doesn't mention the tithe, but it has been suggested that if the tithe was a principle for God's people under the old covenant, we who have experienced God's amazingly generous sacrificial love in Jesus Christ, in his ministry and his cross, should not settle for less.

In 2 Corinthians 8 St Paul specifically draws the Corinthian Christians' attention to the example of Jesus: You know the generosity of our Lord Jesus Christ: he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that through his poverty you might become rich. Our giving as Christians is ultimately in response to God's staggering generosity in Jesus Christ. In chapter 9 Paul talks about God loving a cheerful giver; the word in the original is literally hilarious. It conveys a sense of infectious joyful giving, counting it a privilege to give, because our hearts have been touched by God's love. It is not a matter of calculating how little can I give and keep my conscience clear. Rather it is delighting to have opportunities to give to God and his work in the church and world.

Paul also spells out an important principle of proportionate giving: If we give eagerly according to our means, that is acceptable to God; he does not ask for what we do not have. There is no question of relieving others at the cost of hardship to yourselves; it is a question of equality. In evaluating Parish Share in the diocese we recognise that some parishes will always struggle to pay their way, while other parishes are not only able to pay their way but contribute to financially less well-resourced parts of the diocese. Such an approach is very much in keeping with the principles laid out in St Paul's letter. For someone whose income is such that they are below the level identified as a poverty level to give a tenth of their income to God's work would be enormously sacrificial, while a multi-millionaire, to take an extreme example, could give away 10% and hardly notice it.

St Paul throws out a challenge about giving sacrificially, giving that hurts. He tells the Corinthians about the nearby churches in Macedonia. He sets up a contrast between their troubled times and depth of poverty and their exuberant happiness in showing themselves lavishly open-handed. He says that they didn't simply go to the limit of their resources, but even beyond that limit. Paul is noted for resorting to hyperbole on occasions, but it is clear that the Macedonian Christians were giving in a very sacrificial way, inspired by the example of Christ's sacrificial self-giving love.

A few years back I launched an appeal for building a parish lounge as a way of reaching out into the local community. I was aware of some very sacrificial giving in a congregation where many were not very well placed financially. I was aware of one family who were in a position to afford a Summer holiday but chose to go without a holiday that year and give to the lounge project what they would have spent on their holiday – costly giving in keeping with the spirit of Paul’s letter to Christians in Corinth.

Wallingford and Northwood churches over the years have run regular Missionary Markets where Christians are encouraged to part with valuable possessions to be auctioned to raise money for overseas mission work; over the years well over a million pounds has been raised through these auctions: sacrificial giving, parting with some treasured possession, rejoicing to raise funds for God’s mission.

The main thrust of these two chapters is giving in response to an identified need. For so long the Church of England was largely funded by the Church Commissioners. Today that is no longer the case. It was a great privilege to be funded by the generosity of people from the past, but why should the present ministry and mission of the church be funded that way? Isn’t it more appropriate for the contemporary church to fund her contemporary ministry and mission opportunities? Parish share is largely devoted to covering the costs of our parish clergy. There is a clear need. Our giving is to be in response to that need ensuring that the ministry and mission of the Church across the diocese continue in a healthy way. As a diocese we have identified some clear priorities such as focusing on young people who are largely absent from our churches. Diocesan Synod recognised the importance of funding key people to help parishes engage with children and young people – another clearly identified need; unless Christians in the parishes give, such opportunities are lost.

There is no shortage of needs in the diocese which need funding, but in the light of 2 Corinthians and the challenge of better off Christians

supporting less well-placed congregations we can't sit back complacently when we've supported work in our own parish or diocese. Gloucester diocese is comparatively among the wealthiest in the Church of England, though sadly our levels of giving are among the lowest. We have links with dioceses in India and Africa where our comparative wealth is in marked contrast to their comparative poverty – something to challenge us as we reflect on appropriate levels of giving, responding to need.

The focus of “needs” is on present work undertaken, but at a time when the Church in this country is under considerable pressure, it is important not just to focus on the work we are already engaged in, but prayerfully, imaginatively to consider what opportunities we might be able to seize if we had the financial resources, a budget of opportunity. Some of our parishes where Christians take their giving very seriously have created their own budgets of opportunity, launching out in faith to fund someone to work with young people or to re-order the church to be more welcoming and better suited to engage with the community or to focus on working with a local community project where there is considerable social deprivation or to reach out with Christ's compassionate love to some of the most vulnerable and marginalised in the wider community served by the local church.

As a diocese we are aware of opportunities for the sake of mission and the Kingdom of God that could be seized if instead of wrestling with how to manage a deficit budget we had a surplus of funds through parish share. In the 2010 budget though our national allocation of curates is six, we very reluctantly reduced to five funded through parish share out of a need to balance our books. If we had a surplus of funds we would be able to respond on a larger scale to the national challenge to explore fresh expressions of church alongside our inherited traditional ways of being church. If we had a surplus of funds we could engage more fully through chaplaincy with the many places of higher education in the diocese. If we had a surplus of funds we could engage more effectively with some of the social issues such as the homeless on our streets, work

among prisoners and ex-offenders and many more areas of work. There are limitless opportunities to witness to our Christian faith, to serve God, to serve others for Christ's sake, but our ability to respond to such opportunities is constrained by the financial resources made available through the giving of Christians across the diocese.

I was privileged once to sit on a group concerned to reach out with the good news of the gospel through lay training; our work was helpfully funded by a woman of very considerable financial means. She lived a life of utter simplicity. From the way she dressed you would think she was strapped for cash. She made it clear on numerous occasions that her one longing was to give and give and give so that God's work of mission and evangelism in this country could be extended and enriched. If there were more like her in our churches, I wonder what great things could be achieved in the parishes and benefices of this diocese, the good news of Jesus Christ shared in word and action in countless new ways, leading to the transformation of individuals and to the transformation of communities.

I came across this a while back and have found it personally challenging:

*What giving again I ask in dismay
and must I be giving and giving alway?
Oh no, said the angel, whose eye pierced me through.
Just stop when the Saviour stops giving to you!*

EXAMPLE 4

Kindly provided by:
The Rev'd Aidan Platten,
Chaplain to the Bishop of Gloucester

What can we give him?

What can I give him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man
I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him
Give my heart.

One of the confusions of the Christian life is in discovering what it is that God might expect of us. The question asked by many a believer falls into line with the first two lines of the carol with which we began.

What can I give God?

That question often remains unanswered. If it were written down it would almost certainly end up on the 'too difficult' pile. It is, though, a question that needs to be asked when considering the relationship we seek with God.

The writer of The Letter to the Hebrews writes:

'When Christ came into the world, he said,
"Sacrifices and burnt offerings you have not desired,
but a body you have prepared for me;
in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.
Then I said, 'See, God, I have come to do your will, O God'
Hebrews 10. 5b-7a

Christian discipleship is necessarily taking a full part in the Body of Christ – The Church. In taking a full part, we enter into a relationship and it is in understanding the nature of that relationship

which helps us to answer the question 'What can I give God'.

A rather flippant response or 'get-out', might be to misuse the familiar words 'Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in the heaven and on earth is yours; For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.' *1 Chronicles 29. 11a, 14b*

To defend inertia in response to God with such a powerful piece of scripture would be to underestimate and misunderstand the nature of the relationship we share with God. To get to the heart of that relationship we need to go back to the Christmas poem with which we began, or more specifically to the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

For what happened at the Incarnation was something that two thousand years ago changed the world and by the working of the Holy Spirit through the Body of Christ, the Church, still has the power to continue changing the world. At the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God entered the world in human form by becoming one of us — in Jesus Christ his son. Jesus showed the generosity of the Father to world in feeding five thousand from five loaves and two fish; in turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana, in the healing people ostracised by religion. Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary, who ultimately died on the cross for the redemption of the world. The generosity of God in Jesus is extravagant, it is beyond the bounds of our comprehension; but that does not let us leave the question of our response to God unanswered. The Christian is called to respond to God.

Where might we begin?

The disciples were tasked by Jesus before he died to proclaim the gospel to all nations. That commission is as relevant to the Body of Christ today as it was to those first disciples. That is what the Christian Church has attempted to do for the past two millennia and The Church of England has done in this nation for the past five

hundred years. Sometimes we are more successful than others, but frequently we succumb to a secularist pragmatism that does the gospel a disservice. Our mission too often begins with the pretext that our resources are scarce but we must stretch them as far as possible. It is not possible to be faithful to the gospel of a God of abundance, to be faithful to a God who gave his Son for the life of the world, if we begin from a place of scarcity. When the secularist agenda is pushing for efficiencies, seeking to get more from less, the Body of Christ should be responding by giving more from more. Our mission is expansion. Jesus said:

‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.’

John 10.10

The good news that we are commissioned to tell is news of abundance, of love more than we can comprehend; news of a God who gives extravagantly more than is humanly reasonable.

If we believe that with our whole heart and are to spread the gospel faithfully, we must review our response to God. We must ask again ‘What can I give him?’ The immediate response should simply be ‘I will give everything’ – that is what Jesus asked of the disciples. ‘Deny yourselves, take up your cross and follow me’. We have responsibilities to others too and they have to be taken seriously. However, if we are to be faithful to our baptism and to the gospel we need to resource the Church properly.

The Church needs numerous resources. People and money seem often to be the most obviously lacking resources but we have to begin where we are. That means examining with real honesty the priority we give God in our lives in terms of our time and talent and also in terms of our financial giving. We need to look too at the work of the church beyond our own local community and the opportunities afforded to those who have less in terms of education and social welfare.

Going to Church needs to be more about discipleship than simply socialising. It is extremely important to gather together with others who share our faith for it is this gathering that inspires confidence and it is in these gatherings that Christ promised his presence 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them' (*Matthew 18.20*). Gathering together as Christ's Body is important, but we also have to take seriously the commission to deny ourselves and follow Christ.

Discipleship, by the very root of the word, implies discipline and discipline involves choice. If we are to follow Christ, to proclaim the good news of the abundant love of God, we must make choices and decide on our most important commitments. If we are to be faithful disciples we must resource the Church properly and that inevitably means *giving* more. For some that will mean a simple increase in a pledge, for some it will mean re-evaluating the importance of God in our lives and making choices to spend less on other things and for some it will mean checking that their giving is as effective as possible through giving schemes.

God has given us life; God gave his Son for the healing of the world and our salvation; God gives his Holy Spirit, to animate, encourage us and empower us in mission.

How can we share that abundance, spread that Good News? What can we give him?