

### Welcome

Good morning, and welcome to our final service in our theme preach on giving. Today we conclude the series, reflect back over the past weeks, and through our Spiritual Act of Communion look forward, as we are encouraged and challenged to offer ourselves to God again, as self-giving, gift-giving, life-giving people.

### Giving: a way of living

So over the past 4 weeks we have been looking at the theme of Giving:

*Generous giving* – at the heart of the early church's life together was giving 'with glad and thankful hearts'. Are we generous in our giving to God?

*Appropriate giving* – we are encouraged to willingly give, according to what we have, not with what we don't. How appropriate is our giving to God?

*Sacrificial giving* – in our Christian journey we are called to make sacrifices. How sacrificial is our giving to God?

Today we reflect on *Responsive giving* – we need an 'attitude of gratitude' that equips us to respond with depth and compassion to be generous, appropriate and sacrificial in our giving. How responsive is our giving to God?

### Opening Prayer/Call to worship

Were the whole realm  
of nature mine,  
that were an offering  
far too small;

Love so amazing so, divine,  
demands my soul, my life, my all



**Hymn:** Love divine, all loves excelling STF 503

Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven to earth come down,  
fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
all thy faithful mercies crown.  
Jesu, thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art;  
visit us with thy salvation,  
enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver,  
let us all thy life receive;  
suddenly return, and never,  
never more thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
serve thee as thy hosts above,  
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,  
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation,  
pure and spotless let us be;  
let us see thy great salvation,  
perfectly restored in thee:  
changed from glory into glory,  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise!

### Prayers

Lord, your love for us brings a smile to our faces  
as we share the joy of being alive.

Lord, your love for us brings wonder into our  
hearts as we see the beauty of your creation.

Lord, your love for us brings tears into our eyes  
as we remember the pain you carry for humanity.

Lord, your love for us makes us shout out loud  
as we cannot keep quiet about you.

Lord, your love for us makes us silent  
as no words can express our feelings for you.

### Silence

For the joy of a fresh sunrise,  
for the hope each new day brings,  
for a love that knows no bounds  
we praise you bountiful God.

But even as words of praise pass our lips,  
we know that we have not always lived  
as those who are loved, forgiven, and set free.

We have allowed ourselves to be imprisoned by  
tradition, captive by habit limited by fear.

Through the healing power of love made flesh,  
make us whole, to live and love with open hearts  
and generous spirits. Amen

### The Lord's Prayer

Our Father....

### Reflection

We've all been thinking a lot about giving as we watch our October services week by week. And one thing that has occurred to me is that our giving can often form part of a linked line of giving. This week we're thinking about responsive giving and also joyful giving.

One of the things I find to be a very joy-giving thing is my apple trees. Most are named varieties that exist because someone gave their time and talents – often over a century ago – to create a new variety.

But I have two trees that are extra special to me. Nearly twenty years ago my mother was given a bag of apples by someone with a good crop from a tree on their farm. There were a few too many for her to use so mum gave some of them to me.

We munched a few of them and then I decided to plant some of the pips. Nice plant pot. Lovely compost. Eager love and attention...and nothing happened. In fact, nothing happened all winter. Absolutely nothing!



So I gave up and put what looked like an empty plant pot in our yard and forgot about it. Then in the spring I found some little plants that looked as if they might be trees. My delight knew no bounds. They stayed in that pot for quite a while. I kept an eye on them and I potted them on and waited for another summer, or two. Then I planted the strongest in the garden – probably in the wrong place now that I realise just how big they might turn out to be!

These apple trees are unique. You only get exactly the same apple if you take a graft from an existing tree. If you plant a pip it will be new.

I continue to respond to the needs of these trees. When blossom first appeared about five years ago, I carefully covered the flowers when a frost was forecast. When the leaves look like they might have a bit of mildew, I carefully trim them back. When Monty Don says it's time to prune them, I rather anxiously follow his instructions. (It's possible that I may even have had some conversation with them – though they don't tend to say a great deal).

And now each year they have fruit. I expected the fruit to be fairly inedible and No Fun At All.

But no. The apples are not large, but they are sweet, tangy and delicious. My joy in this is immense.



And I find myself hoping that one day the crop will be sufficient to give apples away so that someone else can take their place in this long line of giving.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Philippians 4: 10-20**

I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> reading:**

##### **Acts 16: 11-15**

From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. From there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.



#### **Time to Reflect**

When I started to think about our theme of giving, I suddenly heard a phrase in my mind from a long time ago – perhaps even from childhood. The phrase was 'there's still some give in it'. What did it mean?

As I thought about it, I began to realise that it meant there was room for more, room for something to expand more – to take in more.

And reading the closing verses of Philippians there's that same sense. In supporting Paul, the Philippians have expanded their concern to encompass his concerns. Their church community can hold more than their own well being as important. Their concern is for Paul, for his mission and this is reflected in their gifts to him – gifts which he is keen to acknowledge. Yes, he depends on God, but he wants them to know how much he appreciates what they are doing for him.

Earlier I talked about how giving can be a line of links from one person to another, to another and so on. If we look at the giving of the Philippian church in this light, we might ask what is the preceding link in the line of giving? What was the instance of giving that was the basic enabling factor? The answer lies in Acts and the story of Lydia.

When we recall the story of Lydia we tend to remember what happened, but not necessarily where it happened. Lydia was in Philippi when she met Paul. Already someone with faith in God, Lydia is one of the women Paul meets when he goes to the river on the Sabbath hoping to find a place of prayer.

Lydia encounters Christ and her response is to be baptised – in fact the writer seems to frame this as part of God's purpose in this place at this moment. He writes, 'the Lord opened her heart.'



Often described as the first Christian in Europe, Lydia is no accidental hearer of the word. She is the right person in the right place.

She hears. She responds. She gives.

And this responsive giving is the start of the community which becomes the church in Philippi. She gives her home as a place for Paul to stay and by the close of the chapter we see that it has become a place for the 'brother and sisters' to meet.

This episode then takes its place in the series of linked responses and giving that led to the Philippians choosing to give to Paul. In giving hospitality, in giving of herself and her resources as an apparently wealthy woman, she lays the foundations of a community that then goes on to support further mission through its support for Paul.

Some of this will strike a chord with us. When we host housegroups we do likewise. In opening our homes for meetings, for social occasions – in more usual times – we do likewise. We share with others and with one another the resources that we have – and just as with Lydia, that includes our homes. If we recall the histories of individual chapels, we may often find that the society traces its roots back to a class, or group meeting taking place in someone's home.

The response we see modelled in the story of Lydia contrasts interestingly with that of the first disciples. When they encounter Jesus they respond by going and by leaving. Lydia responds by staying and by welcoming. The disciples give everything by going; Lydia by staying.

Each response is right and necessary in that context. It might remind us a little of how some are called into peripatetic ministry and others are called to stay and be part of ministering to others where they already are. And each is responsive giving of oneself and one's resources.

But there is this uncomfortable thought - when we give our money are we consciously involving ourselves in the lives and concerns of others? Or are we unknowingly absolving ourselves of actual face to face involvement that costs emotionally as well as financially? Lydia seems to manage both – she gives of herself by giving of her resources.

Perhaps it is useful to draw the comparison with the Philippians because like them, we often use our resources to equip someone who does what we have neither the skills nor opportunity to do. Our responsive giving can be complex. To what are we responding?

Sometimes Jesus is described as being 'moved by compassion' and so are we. We respond to the need of another.

We also respond to God's love for us – as Diana reminded us last Sunday, 'we love because he first loved us'. Sometimes it's as if we have slightly altered that to: we give because he first gave to us. Our giving becomes part of our relationship with God and we find that we begin to be part of his love for the people of our world.

We're also asked to think about joyful giving this week. In both of this morning's readings we are left to imagine how joyful the Philippians and Lydia might have been in their giving.

This concept of joyful giving gives us a lot to think about. Is giving always joyful? Does it need to be? We don't always find joy in giving.

Recently I received one of those bills where the work done is separate from and then added to the amount of tax that made up the rest of the bill. If I am honest, it would be hard to say that my first thought was entirely joyful!

But on reflection and in the context of thinking about giving, that changed. A different kind of joy came from a feeling of gladness that we live in a society where we all contribute something to meeting the needs of one another.

A lack of joy in giving makes little difference to the gift. But it makes a difference to the giver. Does the giver's joy come from the actual giving, or from the joy of the recipient? It's hard to tell. Certainly, Paul is a joyful recipient of the Philippians' generosity.

Perhaps we all can remember that tipping point moment from childhood when the joy and excitement of Christmas stopped being about what we would receive and instead became the excitement and anticipation of what we gave to others.

I think it's a false opposite to contrast joyful giving with grudging giving. Rather, I feel that it can be contrasted more interestingly with giving from a sense of duty. Continuing to give when it is demanding and painful – even when it is unappreciated – is part of what it is to be human. Faith does not obviate that. But it does help to sustain us.

In thinking about joyful giving I'm reminded of Paul's words about the fruits of the Spirit. One of those fruits is joy. So can we say that joyful giving in this context is a giving that is both prompted by, and is consequential upon our response to the Holy Spirit working within us?

It's an interesting thought... that we can give in the Spirit. How else are we to understand how a bare financial transaction can become an expression of often profound love?

Our gifts into the world, the church and our shared community together are that expression of profound love, whether experienced as joy, or as duty. To remind ourselves of the phrase, there is 'give' in us. We are able to expand our concerns, to bring in all sorts of people and things into the sphere of our responsibility. To make room for them to the extent that they are no longer 'them', but 'us - all of us'.

We all look at our own talents, time, self and money and feel how very small they are – especially when we see the shocking enormity of God's love for us. 'Me? I don't do much', we say. But you do. We do.

In the moments of the simplest prayers to the most complex plans to help others.

In each moment when our compassion, our duty, our concern prompts us to give into the lives of others and one another.

In every moment when the joy of the Spirit is in our actions and in us. Amen

### **An Act of Spiritual Communion**

*Prepare a prayerful space. You might find it helpful to place a cross, or candle there, or to have an icon, image, or symbol. You might like to place your open Bible in front of you.*



Loving God,  
as I worship you in my home, but joined together with Christian brothers and sisters I cannot be with, and our eyes cannot meet as we worship, but our hearts are joined in the great sea of your love, help me to remember that you are here with me and with all of us.

May I pray to you in faith,  
praise you with gratitude,  
and hear your word with eagerness;  
in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Spend a moment in reflection on the theme of our October services: "Giving – generous, appropriate, sacrificial and responsive giving"*

*Generous giving* – do I give with a glad and thankful heart; am I generous in my giving to God?

*Appropriate giving* – do I give willingly with what I have, not with what I don't; am I appropriate in my giving to God?

*Sacrificial giving* – does my faith call for sacrifices; am I ever sacrificial in my giving to God?

*Responsive giving* – do I have an 'attitude of gratitude'; am I willing to invite the Spirit to equip me in my responsive and joyful giving to God?

### **A personal prayer**

Take my life and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;  
Take my moments and my days  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise  
Take...

...my hands and feet...

....my voice and lips....

...my silver and intellect....

....my will and heart

Take my love; my Lord, I pour  
at thy feet its treasure-store.  
Take myself,  
and I will be  
Ever, only, all for thee.





So....

- *What gifts am I thankful for?*
- *What gifts have I got to share?*
- *How can I offer my gifts?*
- *What gifts do I see in others?*
- *How can I encourage others to use them?*

Self-giving, gift-giving, life-giving God,  
thank you for all I have received – my being, my  
time, my talents, my personal resources.

Help me to develop an attitude of gratitude;  
that in *why* I give, *when* I give, *what* I give  
and *how* I give it, I may do so with a glad and  
thankful heart, seeking nothing in return,  
save only knowing that I have been caught up  
in the mystery of your self-giving, gift-giving, life-  
giving love to all. Amen

### **Prayers for others**

Self-giving God,  
thank you for the offering of yourself –  
this wonderful world  
the beauty of creation  
our friends and family  
the work of Christ.

We pray for those on the frontline of care in these  
unprecedented days; give us a generous spirit of  
giving to offer our time, our talents, our selves and  
our gifts.

Gift-giving God  
thank you for providing for our needs –  
food to eat (enough for all is we share)  
talents and graces,  
skills and abilities,  
time and a mind to think.

We pray for those who are 'keeping the wheels  
turning' around us in these unprecedented days;  
give us an appropriate spirit of giving to offer our  
time, our talents, our selves and our gifts.

Life-giving God  
thank you for sustaining and renewing us –  
for the air we breathe,  
the health we have to live each day  
the skills of those who help us  
the work of your Spirit.  
We pray for the needs of those we know, and  
those whose needs are known only by you.  
We pray for those in positions of responsibility in  
these unprecedented days; give us a sacrificial  
spirit of giving, willing to give of our time, our  
talents, our selves and our gifts. Amen

**Hymn:** Lord, you call us to your service STF 664

Lord, you call us to your service,  
each in our own way.  
Some to caring, loving, healing;  
some to preach, or pray;  
some to work with quiet learning,  
truth discerning, day by day.

Life for us is always changing  
in the work we share.  
Christian love adds new dimensions  
to the way we care.  
For we know that you could lead us,  
as you need us, anywhere.

Seeing life from your perspective  
makes your challenge plain,  
as your heart is grieving over  
those who live in pain.  
Teach us how, by our compassion,  
you may fashion hope again.

Lord, we set our human limits  
on the work we do.  
Send us your directing Spirit,  
pour your power through,  
that we may be free in living  
and in giving all for you.

### **Blessing**

Go out with a pocket full of free gifts  
to give to those you meet.  
Give freely your love and concern  
as a token of the great love of God.  
Give freely your time and effort  
as a token of the sacrifice of Jesus  
Give freely your help and friendship  
as a token of the  
upholding Spirit.  
And may all you give  
and all you do  
cause others to seek the  
true gift of the God  
who blesses without  
end. Amen



CCLI no. 3722