

## **Sermon 30-09-18**

### **Matthew 6:25-33**

My grandfather was a church treasurer for many years and when he died his best friend wrote proudly in their Church Magazine that in no year had he allowed the church's expenditure to exceed its income. I don't necessarily agree with the friend, money is meant to be used, but am telling you this as a measure of Grandad's integrity. He also left me two legacies.

The first was set out in his will and I received it in the form of a building society passbook a few days after my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, as did the rest of his grandchildren. The second he had already given me although it was only many years later before I understood that. It was on the final occasion that he took us to church. Now this was not the church that he usually went to, his generosity extended to taking his grandchildren to somewhere that he considered to be more child friendly. But it was on that day when I got the hang of this Jesus thing, realised that the Bible was not just a book of stories from a long time ago, but that it had relevance to real life, relevance even to me.

Today we are celebrating Harvest, taking the opportunity to thank God for the things that he has given us and hopefully showing our gratitude by bringing gifts of food for others who may otherwise go hungry. . It is only since I have had a daughter-in-law who is a farmer that I have become aware of the impact that even small anomalies in the weather can cause to the balance of farming yields. On a good year our rural ancestors would be celebrating the end of a period of long hard days in the field, filling the barns with the grain that would feed them until the following year. And bringing part of their harvest to church in grateful thanks. Harvest thanksgiving would have had a real meaning for them. This morning's readings have no mention of grain or dirty carrots so actually provide an easier parallel with modern life. Chronicles simply tells us 'everything is from you and we only give what we have received from you'.

Paul is even more direct with the Corinthians. He is testing them. The Christians in Jerusalem are in great need, how will the Corinthians respond? He hopes that they will show their love for God in their generosity for others. Show their willingness to give some of what they have in excess of their needs to help others who don't have enough.

'Everything is from you and we only give what we have received from you.' Today's world is full of exhortations to plan for this, insure against that, and make life more comfortable for ourselves. What a contrast with the passage from Matthew where we are told not to worry about the future. God will provide whatever is sufficient. Tomorrow will take care of itself. But despite being told not to we do worry about our own futures and the future of the church.

Of course the upkeep of the parish buildings costs money, and the good news is that we are just about bringing in sufficient income to cover that and our admin costs. But buildings alone do not make a church nor allow us to fulfil our commission to spread the Gospel.

Our current financial state leaves nothing over to use for mission activities. We know that there are thousands of people in Shirley not connected to any church. What could we do for them? There are people who have approached us for baptisms or funerals, perhaps with active encouragement they would become members of our church community. People who are lonely and would value company over a cup of tea. All these activities have a cost if only that while we are using Church House for

our own activities we cannot be collecting rent from outside groups.

Then there are the children. We know that our most successful engagement with children occurs when we go to them. As a parish we are blessed with 16 schools - many other parishes would be jealous - but with this bounty comes responsibility to tell God's story as widely as possible to these children. Not everyone has a grandfather like mine. We would love to be able to provide more for these children. If we can engage more with them and their families encourage them to see what we really are about, they too may engage more with us.

And there are people overseas living in a level of poverty that we cannot imagine. As a church we currently have no regular commitment to overseas mission. Not something of which we can be proud. Like the Corinthians we have responsibility to people in other places, to support them in their time of need.

Someone asked me the other day where the ideas for sermons came from – the shape of this one came while I on a bus from Folkestone to Canterbury. I confess that my visit was more coffee shop than cathedral, in fact I made some notes on a napkin in one of them. But there seems

to be something very proper in thinking about mission in the place where St Augustine was based.

‘Everything is from you and we only give what we have received from you’. In the next few weeks we will all receive a letter about giving to the church. It explains where we currently are financially and how we could use extra funds to help the church to grow, to fill those buildings we are currently paying for. How much better a vibrant buzzing church than an empty space, however well maintained. The letter reminds us that the Church of England encourages its members to consider giving 5% of their annual income, and to give it in a responsible way.

In his first legacy my Grandad could be certain of what I would receive and when. He would be pleased to hear that I used it towards the deposit on a flat and that it is still helping to keep a roof over my head today. He was a cautious man but that did not stop him from making his second legacy with hope. Hope that the messages his grandchildren heard in church would fall on fertile ground that the seed sown would flourish and grow. He knew there was no guarantee that would happen but he had faith that it would. If we want the same for the children of our parish we need to take some action. This may mean

us stepping out of our own comfort zone, financial or otherwise.

When you get that letter about stewardship please read it carefully, pray about how you should respond, remembering that the busy church we would like to be part of will not happen unless we all make it so.