

St Peter's Anglican Church, Bundoora

11th Sunday After Pentecost

Sunday 04/08/2024

Sermon Series – Generosity, Stewardship and Giving (Week 1 of 3)

Reading 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a / Ps 51:6-9 / Ephesians 4:1-16 / Matthew 6:19-34

(Readings are from New Revised Standard Version)

Sermon Theme: *Worry*

By Rev'd Stephen Monsieigneur

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

²⁶ When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. ²⁷ When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. ¹ and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, 'There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor. ² The rich man had very many flocks and herds; ³ but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meagre fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴ Now there came a traveller to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.' ⁵ Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, 'As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; ⁶ he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.' ⁷ Nathan said to David, 'You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; ⁸ I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. ⁹ Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰ Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. ¹¹ Thus says the Lord: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. ¹² For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.' ¹³ David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' Nathan said to David, 'Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die.'

Ps 51:6-9

⁶ You that desire truth in the inward parts:
O teach me wisdom in the secret places of the heart.

⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸ Make me hear of joy and gladness:
let the bones which you have broken rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins:
and blot out all my iniquities.

Ephesians 4:1-16

¹ I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. ⁷ But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.⁸ Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.'⁹ (When it says, 'He ascended', what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)

¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. ¹⁴ We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Matthew 6:19-34

¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust^[a] consume and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust^[b] consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² "The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If, then, the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.^[c]

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink,^[d] or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life?^[e] ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' ³² For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God^[f] and his^[g] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

³⁴ "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

SERMON.

One of the common truisms about generosity is that it does as much or more for the giver as it does for the one to whom generosity is given. The idea that in giving there is a reciprocal benefit to oneself is not a recent development but one which has been at the basis of social structure.

Consider these words of St Francis of Assisi which we recall in hymns and prayers, "For it is in giving that we receive." Francis born into wealth and influence realised the isolating nature of a focus on earthly wealth and the importance of using gifts from God in service to others. So committed was he to this belief that he turned his back on privilege and power to live as humbly as any person could.

But what is generosity? What is it to be generous?

Simone de Beauvoir¹ describes true generosity as the 'giving of your all, and yet feeling as if it costs you nothing.'

Many of us will have childhood memories of learning the beauty of generosity. Being taught to give something we prize, that we may taste the happiness of giving, for example friendship. The thing we give is not the issue but rather its meaning and value to us at the time of giving; even a lolly can be worth gold.

We often talk of stewardship in the context of managing or being care takers for God, typically in respect to the operation of the church. While not necessarily biblical, I feel elements of these quotes point to a need for us open our eyes to a greater way of understanding stewardship.

Beginning today and continuing for the next two Sundays our Gospel readings will be centred on the idea "treasure in heaven," and I hope, will present a challenge to us. A challenge to reconsider our mind- (and heart) set when it comes to understanding our commitment to stewardship and generosity.

Psalms 51, is the key to thinking, and more importantly to believing and living, differently when it comes to our own stewardship and generosity, our own dealing with the responses of worry, grief and fear that are a human reaction to the idea of being uncertain and reliant on others.

Noah benShea² said "Either the key to a man's -persons- wallet is in [the] heart, or the key to a man's -persons- heart is in [the] wallet. So, unless you express your charity, you are locked inside your greed."

The reference in Matthew's Gospel to your heart being where your treasure is, comes in the context of Jesus' preaching and teaching and is located in the centre of the passages we know as the Sermon on the Mount.

¹ **Simone Lucie Ernestine Marie Bertrand de Beauvoir** (9 January 1908 – 14 April 1986) was a French existentialist philosopher, writer, social theorist, and feminist activist raised in the Catholic religious tradition.

² **Noah benShea** is a North American poet, philosopher, scholar, advisor, lecturer, and author, Sermon reference taken specifically from benShea's work; *Jacob the Baker: Gentle Wisdom For a Complicated World*.

Jesus speaking to this audience, *who I expect are curious to learn more about his thoughts and his motives*, sets up a tension around stewardship and generosity in terms of where one's devotion lies, potentially suspended as it were, between two poles that are in tension, and which pull at us - two "masters." These two "poles" are the heavenly and the earthly, that which is of God, or that which is not: The point is, you cannot serve God *and* wealth.

Jesus, interestingly, defines this tension, as a question of worry.

Worry is a reality of our human nature, about our life, being fed and hydrated, being clothing, having enough money, and about the bottom line that comes with those things, about having enough, can threaten to separate us from God.

Who has never worried about having enough?

Worry separates us from God. It draws our focus away from what we have and how it can be used to what don't I have and how can I attain it. We can see evidence of this for example when our focus and time is spent more on what others have, too much time on earning, managing, spending, too much fretting over what is enough and even what to do with what one has, etc.

What worries you most about your money? Whatever your answer, in each case worry keeps us from right relationship with God.

In the face of this tension, Matthew's Jesus accuses the worriers of having little faith. The accusation is that trust is lacking, reliance on God is taken away from God and held by the individual as one's own. How often do we fail to truly trust God instead believing we know or can do better?

Then with the declaration - *"Strive for the Kingdom of God, and God's righteousness."* Jesus tells us what we are to do.

I suspect that like myself, for many of us, striving isn't the problem, rather, it is the object of the striving that matters. The assertion at this point is that trust in God must come first. Striving for this trust, and for a worry-free view of money or whatever we see as our want and source of worry, opens a window to God in the heart. How do we do this?

Psalms 118:1-4 is a helpful prayer at this point, as it offers a life-orienting attitude that is different from worry, "Let me hear joy and gladness." Joy and gladness, in what one has being in relationship with the God who clothes the lilies, and who feeds the birds of the air, places greater value on us. In other words, trust that our God has got us, can reshape the way we think of our relationship both to God and to wealth.

Worry will separate us from our God and choke out our generosity. Joy and gladness in our "inward being" are the key to a free and generous stewardship where we serve God without the distraction of worry. Our money, our very being and all we possess is rightly to be used as an agent of that service.

August is the time when we at St Peter's reassess our giving, so as you take time to reflect pray this week, ask yourself; How considering my own circumstance, do and can I demonstrate gratefulness for the abundance that God has given me? Amen.