

Sermon for Sunday 21.8.16

It is that time of year when we take stock of our financial position as a parish family and check to see how we are going in terms of our yearly budget.

In the sermon today I will be saying something about our financial giving and one always wonders how to go about doing this in such a way that will be sensitive to all, and at the same time have the best effect for the benefit of the parish as a whole.

Giving, in regards to our regular monetary commitment, can be a delicate subject as I'm sure we are all aware, because many of us may feel that we give much, either in money or works or donations of goods or services, as many of us do on a regular basis.

Our regular financial offering however, does play an integral part in keeping our church community alive and growing in worship, service and mission, and I would like to thank you for the generous way in which you give, and I pray that mission here at Grovely parish continues to grow in the way that it is.

Now given the complexity of the subject, and after contemplative prayer time, I believe the best way for me to include the topic of giving in the sermon, is to talk in a general sense about living the *gospel life*.

What I mean by this, is living a life in which we are consciously aware that in Jesus Christ we are each enfolded in divine love.

Such a life is so full of positivity and empowerment that we are open to God, ourselves and our neighbour in love, tolerance, acceptance, humility, and hospitality.

The gospel life is a life of true freedom in Christ.

It is also a life that is counter cultural and one that needs to be continually fed and nurtured in our constant prayerful relationship with God.

I think most of us who live by faith, have glimpses of this life in its fullness, and perhaps those glimpses expand and decrease in different times in our lives.

Yet what a joy it is to be on the journey to the wholeness of the gospel life.

During the week I was listening to Ilia Delio¹ who is a contemporary theologian, a scientist and a religious sister in the Franciscan order.

Ilia spoke about St Francis as someone who lived the fullness of the gospel life.

To sum up his way of life, St Francis consciously lived in the belief that the gospel is the living word and that Jesus Christ was alive in his life.

Therefore everything in Francis' life was gift.

¹ Ilia Delio, Gospel Life in the 21st Century. YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czofZ8ZKIFl&list=PLLyukImV2xvhRioWOqBJ1pHG6TLQGZ3TE>

Every breathe, every flower, every creature, every life, every brother and sister was gift.

All came from the abundance of God in Christ.

Francis never spoke of himself as an I – he never once spoke in terms of, my Lord or my life, but always in the plural *we*; *we adore you, we thank you*.

His prayer was the Our Father.

Francis only ever saw himself in relationship to the whole and was held in that wholeness by his faith and belief that Christ was literally alive in his life.

When I was listening to Ilia's lecture I felt a deep yearning to come into the fullness of the gospel life the way that St. Francis did. I eagerly wrote notes and replayed different sections of the lectures many times. It was on about the 4th rerun that I turned to today's gospel and read more detail about God's kingdom in the world.

In this rich text we hear the story of a woman who has been bent up for 18 years and how she was healed by Jesus. The religious leader in the story says that people should come on the other 6 days of the week to be cured, but not on the Sabbath.

Jesus responded by exposing the hypocrisy - he pointed out that If an animal could be freed on the Sabbath, why couldn't a human being be freed on the Sabbath.

In this passage, Luke shows the fullness of God's kingdom revealed in Jesus.

The woman symbolises the inclusivity of the kingdom, the religious leader, symbolises the blindness of the tradition to the presence of the kingdom, and Jesus is the presence of the kingdom.

Jesus makes it clear that the Jewish religious heritage is not restricted in any way, certainly not by ones health or by one's gender. It is open to all and all are invited.

Taking up this invitation fully or living the gospel life to the full, might be for the saints who have gone before us and for the saints right here in this congregation.

Yet, I believe the gospel life offers everyone the opportunity to participate in God's kingdom on earth wherever we are on our life's journey, and indeed encourages each one of us to yearn to respond in generosity, so that we can share with others what we have in the kingdom of God in the world.

Our offering each week is our offering to God. We give because we have a need to give, in response to God's self-giving gift in Jesus Christ. It matters little that the nature of our response is inevitably inadequate- this is so whether we give a dollar, a tithe or a double tithe. What is important is that our hearts are sincere, and that our offering is precisely that, an offering which reflects and represents what God has given us.

This is a very important part of the living the gospel life because our financial contribution represents us in a way that nothing else can, it is the offering of money that is the closest proxy we can have to offering ourselves.

We remember here the gospel story about Jesus sitting outside the treasury and the widow came and put a penny in the treasury.

Her offering spoke about who she was. It spoke about her as someone who had total trust and dependence upon God.

The activity of the gospel life is to be open to receive wholeness through God's grace, and to give to God in gratitude and in love for ourselves and for each other.

It is simply the way of life in Christ.

May we all continue to live the gospel life and to grow into its fullness, and reflect what this means for us in our offerings.

The Lord be with you.