

Mattins 25.08.19

2 Corinthians 9: *“The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will reap bountifully.”*

Paul write to the Christians of Corinth and urges them to be generous as he seeks to make a collection for Christians at Jerusalem. And, as we heard, he uses an agricultural metaphor: the more seed you sow, the greater will be your harvest.

Agriculture doesn't especially work like that in our own day where seed and fertilizer are more likely to be sown very precisely to minimise waste and maximise yield. However, we can understand the picture which Paul paints here as he uses it to support his argument that greater generosity will bring the greater reward. 'You will be enriched', he writes 'in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us...'

It is a really interesting world-view, and one of the questions we might ask of ourselves is, 'Do we believe it? Do we believe that the more we give, the more we receive? And there are a number of supplementary questions which follow from that: if we do believe it, do we want to buy into it as a vision, and if we do want to, what might be the consequence for us?

And then, there is the question of how we might go about being generous, and all the complexities which that brings to the fore: should we give to those who beg on our streets? And if the answer to that question is no because to do so doesn't necessarily help them, then a further question is, then what do we do appropriately or those who do live, sleep and beg to stay alive? What does a generous, compassionate and useful response look like?

Or if we should decide to give through charities, how can we be sure that our generosity will make a difference to those who need it? We are all too aware of the issues which Oxfam has had, where needy people have not been served well as their employees in one or two places have behaved in ways which betray the organisation for which they work and the people whom they should have been serving?

And all these difficulties and complexities give us ample reason not to be generous because generosity seems to be so very difficult.

And yet, Paul would want to claim that generosity brings many blessings: God loves the cheerful giver and the source of the giver's cheerfulness could well be in the simple act of giving.

For as we consider these things we are invited to move away from seeing our relationships as transactional and are invited instead to partake in the divine economy, to fully grasp the generosity of God's bountiful provision for us, his limitless grace, and begin to inhabit a world which is marked by a sense of generous interdependence.

Matthew's gospel records a parable of Jesus, in which, at the end of the working day a landowner pays all the workers the full daily wage, irrespective of whether they had worked all day or just one hour. In response to the not entirely unmerited complaints from those who had worked all

day, Jesus describes the landowner as saying: 'Take what belongs to you and go: I choose to give this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose which what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

'I am generous.' Jesus places those words into the mouth of his fictitious landowner and in doing so teaches us very clearly something of the nature of God, his abounding goodness, which Paul argues its more powerful expression in his 'indescribable gift', the gift even of his son Jesus for the life of the world.

So there's the invitation: to respond to God's generosity by living generous lives. And the promise is that far from impoverishing us, to do so will make us immeasurably richer. For 'you will be enriched in every way for your great generosity.'