

Bennochy church 21<sup>st</sup> October 2012

Let's imagine you have won the lottery and let's make it a nice round number, you have won £20 million! What would you do with the money? What would you keep and why, and what would you give away and to who? I suspect it is easier to dream about what we don't have, there is no pressure on us, because we don't actually have the money to make such decisions. If we actually had £20 million, the whole dynamic changes, and I think the pressure to hold onto more of the money would increase.

Del boy in *Only fools and horses* always wanted to be a millionaire and when he finally achieved his goal, he wasn't content with that; now he wanted to be a billionaire. Human nature dictates that often, the more you have, the more you want.

We heard earlier two totally contrasting stories from the New Testament. There was a man who was obviously very rich, he is challenged by Jesus, not just to obey all the commands of God, but to give away all that he has and then come and follow Jesus. Like a lottery winner he has the money. For him this is no dream, it is reality. I don't think for a moment that Jesus is saying everyone should give everything away, the world needs money in order for it to function; for those to receive, there must be those who can give. But Jesus recognises in this man that his wealth was his stumbling block to following God, but he was not prepared to make the sacrifice to follow Jesus and went

away very sad. He knew what he should do, but he could not let go. For this man it was his money, for us it might be something else.

Contrast that with the poor widow, who would have had little means of support and was powerless in Jewish society; observed by Jesus, she drops all she has into the temple treasury. We are told nothing else about her, only that her response to God is one of sacrifice.

So one is asked to give all, is wealthy, but turns away, the other has little, but gives everything to God. Now we might be thinking, we are neither rich as the man was, nor so poor as the widow, yet these two stories share the common theme of sacrificial giving, the responses were different and that is what challenge us, as we reflect on our response to God.

It may not be the most Scottish or Presbyterian of texts but we are told in 2 Corinthians 9: 7 that God loves a cheerful giver! The original context here is Paul's ongoing plan for the younger churches, such as in Corinth, to give financial aid to the mother church in Jerusalem. He wants to make sure that the promised gift is ready, and says to them, give not with regret or out of a sense of duty. This brings us back to what stewardship is all about. It is our response to the gifts of God. What God has given to us; our time, talents and financial resource. We hold them in trust and offer them back to God.

Paul seems to be saying to the rich young man, it is OK, give your wealth away, God will supply what you need to live on. He is saying to the poor widow, it is OK to give all you have; God will honour that and take care of you. I wonder what Paul is saying to us? *“God is able to give you more than you need, so that you will always have all you need for yourselves and more than enough for every good cause.”* These are real words of faith! How do we hear them today? What is God saying to us?

Out of sacrifice comes the means of generosity. Plant a large number of seeds i.e. give generously and God will provide; now that is counter cultural! Giving not just for the sake of giving, but that it might give glory to God, after all, they firmly believed that God heard the prayers of the poor, and for Paul, the Corinthian church would benefit from their prayers! That’s just not normal. Most people today would not give that as their motivation in being generous to others.

Two of the great recent philanthropists, are Andrew Carnegie and Bill Gates, who is chairman of Microsoft.

I tried to find out what motivated Bill Gates. Wikipedia says this, *“Gates began to appreciate the expectations others had of him when public opinion mounted suggesting that he could give more of his wealth to charity.”* Gates studied the work of Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, and in 1994 sold some of his Microsoft stock to create the William H. Gates Foundation. In 2000, Gates and his wife combined three family

foundations into one to create the charitable Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. As of 2007, Bill and Melinda Gates were the second-most generous philanthropists in America, having given over \$28 billion to charity. It had an endowment of US\$33.5 billion as of September 30, 2011 and they plan to eventually give 95% of their wealth to charity. Not quite the rich young man but I am sure they will still be able to live off the remaining 5%! It is extremely generous but not sacrificial.

*In* December 9, 2010, Gates, investor Warren Buffett and Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook's CEO) signed a promise they called the "Gates-Buffet Giving Pledge", in which they promised to donate to charity at least half of their wealth over the course of time.

I suspect we are a wee bit closer to the widow’s mite than Bill Gates, but our responsibility of Stewardship, to use our money, time and talents wisely and responsibly under God, is exactly the same.

Paul finishes the passage by talking about God’s extraordinary grace. Grace being an undeserving recipient of the love of God. So grace is the foundation of our Stewardship and grace is the means by which God will supply all our needs, whether to the rich man who could not let go, the widow who gave all she had, or to ourselves, as we seek to give as we have decided, cheerfully. As for Bill Gates, I have no doubt that God uses and will continue to use his money, for his own purposes. Amen.