

## 20141019DedicatedGivingSermon

A few weeks ago a young couple got married here at St Paul's. They chose 'Amazing Grace' as one of the hymns for the wedding. On the next day Sunday someone said to me in surprise, "Did they really have that funeral hymn at their wedding?!" Firstly, "Amazing Grace" is not a funeral hymn; it is a hymn that John Newton its author used to express his gratitude to God for saving him. Saving him from what? John Newton was a slave trader who came to the realisation that to trade in human beings as commodities was contrary to God's will, contrary to the fact that we are created in the image of God. John Newton wrote this poignant hymn to express the great gratitude of an undoubted sinner for being found when he was lost.

We heard today two parables about things that were lost and how they were found. How do you feel about your faith and for being 'found' because that is what has happened. It is so easy for us to say things like, "I've been a Christian all my life – I've never **lost** my faith." But your very presence here this morning is an indication that you have found faith. For some that finding of faith was a dramatic event – as with our patron saint, Paul. For other's it is a slow and perhaps unconscious coming to an awareness of faith.

Most of you are regular attendees here. You come because you want to give thanks to God who has made a difference in your life. Soon after we got married Karen was playing the organ at the Congregational Church and as the collection was brought forward the first verse of a hymn was sung. That verse went as follows:

We give thee but thine own

Whate'er that gift may be

All that we have is thine alone

A trust O Lord from thee

Everything we have, our money, our livelihood, the education which makes it possible to earn that livelihood, our families, our attitude to life which makes us productive and employable people, all that is a gift from God. What we are giving back is a "thank you" to God for all God has given us. But it is more than that... we are giving so that we can enable God to work within the lives of so many others that they too might have all the benefits that this wonderful world has to offer.

Paul tells us in Romans that we are motivated by the Spirit. We have physical and financial needs, but we Christians are **not** motivated by profit – a reward system for being good, but by having in us the mind of Jesus, which sees ourselves as fellow-workers with him, we look not so much what our gifts give us, but what God does with them.

This is stated in the lovely passage from Isaiah (and how appropriate at this time of year as we see the Western Cape Floral Kingdom in all its glory!). No amount of rain will fall on the earth and return to the skies until it has watered the earth. Isn't it great to know that every bit of money you have given to God through this church will be used for the building of God's kingdom?

In the Gospel, the two parables speak about the lost being found. We can take those lost items as being ourselves – like John Newton – and how we are found. How? By others who brought to us knowledge of God and the salvation brought by Jesus his son. Or perhaps those lost items are others who are still seeking salvation. How is salvation going to be brought to them? Through the Church... And not just by means of direct evangelism but through numerous and various means – the services and all their required facilities of organist, bread, wine, leaflets, building, pews, church garden, hall, tea after service etc, by the community created by the people of God at soup kitchens, bible study groups, house churches, and even at our fundraising events - these all are seeking the lost and as the lost are found so there is joy in heaven and joy in the presence of the angels.

So, each of us plays a role in finding the lost through our dedicated giving contribution. How do we respond to God's saving activity in the lives of others? Are we being mean and grudging like the Pharisees were on occasions? There are preachers who use Dedicated Giving Sunday to "buy" the support of the congregation. They promise that if you

give to God, God will give to you, and that what you put in the collection plate, God will use to multiply mercies and benefits and you, personally will score. Nice thought, but it doesn't work that way. But on the other hand, Henri Nouwen has said "you won't become poorer, you'll become richer by giving". Yes, we will; but in a different sense and our readings this morning show us that we belong to something much bigger than ourselves, and what we give is a response to God - in thankfulness and not as an invitation to God to fill our pockets.

Everything that you have given to God, money, time, talents, prayers, even a chance remark to a neighbour, all can and mostly are used to grow God's Kingdom. For those of you who have forgotten to keep up-to-date with your DG promises this year, I'm sure you want to be part of St Paul's ongoing ministry of finding out the lost? As we plan and budget for next year we do so on the basis of your pledge to God, and we can do so much more with you on board as a pledged giver. You have been given an envelope with a card inside. Please fill in that card with the amount you plan to give in 2015 and bring them to church next Sunday.

Today we say thank you to you for what you have pledged and given this year, but we also say thank you to God, and we invite you to continue to be an active part of our parish ministry, so that we can refurbish our properties, continue to run the soup kitchen, to pay salaries to our staff, and do the outreach work which, through your generosity is becoming increasingly possible, all are a vital part of what God wants us to do. He provides for us to equip us for his work. Let us continue to respond with the same generosity God has shown us.