

Sunday 3rd October, Matins

Joshua 3:7-end, Matthew 10 1-22

Rev'd Mary Spredbury, Kensington Episcopal Area Finance Adviser

Good morning – As Mother Emma has said my name's Mary Spredbury and I'm the Area Finance Adviser. I've worked for the diocese of London for over 20 years and in 2006 I was ordained and have been at the same church, St Mary Acton, ever since. Prior to working for the diocese I worked in banking in the City. The work was very interesting involving managing bad and doubtful deb accounts but I gradually concluded that I needed to do something more fulfilling. So when I saw an advertisement for this job I applied and I got it – I was already very involved in church life, being on the Area Finance Group and on diocesan synod. Anyway that's a bit of background.

Thinking about what links both passages we've had this morning one of the things that struck me was that they are both about trust – trust in God – the Israelites trusting that they would be able to cross the Jordan even though it was at its highest. It must have seemed unlikely that this would be possible and yet they appear to have simply walked into the water in faith. In our reading from Matthew's gospel the disciples are trusting that they will be provided for. Jesus sends them out and tell them to take no money or change of clothes and that they would be in danger – and yet they went. We too are called to trust in the provision of God – sometimes we are called to do things that may seem beyond our abilities, beyond our comfort zone. We are called to respond in the knowledge that God is there beside us and will never leave us.

Our relationship with money is closely linked to our faith and our relationship with God – money gives us security and it's rare that we think we have enough. Even if we have sufficient for our day to day essentials and activities we will save to have a back up, a safety net. I am not saying that this is bad – the question for each of us is when saving becomes hoarding and that is quite a difficult line to tread – I think that sometimes it's fear of not having enough that stops us being the generous people God calls us to be,

Jesus has a lot to say about money and possessions so I imagine it was a sensitive matter then and some of it was pretty tough – thinking about the widow's mite where the widow gave all that she had (again in trust) or the rich young ruler who told Jesus he was keeping the commandments of God and asked what more he should do. Jesus told him to sell all that he had give the proceeds to the poor.

Today we are giving thanks to God for his provision of food and for the harvest and you will be giving to the upper room to feed those in need – and in that spirit of thankfulness it's a good time to think about our giving in general.

As followers of Christ we give thankfully and generously not just to the church but to other charities and concerns – giving is part of how we live out our faith in our lives. I think what God is most concerned about is not how much we give but our attitude to money. God is just as interested in what we spend on Monday – Saturday as in what we give the church on a Sunday. All we have is a gift from God and we are to use money and all the gifts he has given us wisely and carefully.

Christian giving involves thinking and praying about what it is right for us, at this time and in our current circumstances to give. Generosity is part of our nature – we are made in the image of the most generous give of all – God our creator.

Our giving is in response to God's love for each of us – a previous Archbishop of Canterbury said the question to ask is "how can my giving reflect something of God's love for me" – not my love for God but God's overwhelming love for me – that is a challenge to each of us – does our giving to the church in any way reflect God's love for us.

We know too that giving is part of loving – the people we give presents to on birthdays and at Christmas are those we love. The charities we support are the those we care about, perhaps passionately. In the same way our giving to the church is about love – God’s love for us and our love for God and for our fellow sisters and brothers in Christ.

This morning we are particularly thinking about legacy giving – legacy giving is just one part of our giving as Christians and is our final act of generously giving away – giving away all we have as we certainly can’t take it with us when we die.

The first thing I want to emphasise is the importance of making a will – if you haven’t already done so I strongly suggest that you do, even if you think you don’t have much to leave. It will save your loved ones a lot of work and it will mean that your money and possessions are distributed in accordance with your wishes rather than as laid down in law by the state. Wills should also be reviewed regularly – at least every 5 years as circumstances change and so do our wishes.

The most important reason for making a will is so that you can ensure your loved ones, family and friends, receive what you want them to receive – your final act of care for them. Only after you have made provision for loved ones would I encourage you to think about leaving gifts to the charities you support and to your church .

Many churches have benefited from legacies over the years – I’m sure this one has too. For some churches legacies have been transformative, enabling them to undertake new work or start a major project. It’s often a way of making a more sizeable gift than you are able to do during your lifetime although of course all gifts, big and small, are gratefully received.

One way of thinking about gifts in wills is to think about leaving shares of the total. It’s the same principle as giving a share or proportion of your income regularly to church. One of my friends, who I was an executor for, did exactly that. She only had one close family member and left him 50% of her estate. She then left four shares of 10% to various friends and the final 10% was split between two charities.

I think that deep down we all want to leave a legacy in its widest sense – we all want our lives to have made a difference – to the people we care for and more widely. One of the ways we can do that is in how we leave our wealth and possessions at our death. Leaving a legacy to St Mary Abbots will help to ensure that the work of God continues in this place and that future generations will be able to come hear and learn of and experience the love of God in their lives. If you do leave a gift in your will can I encourage you to simply leave it for the PCC to decide exactly what it should be used for – what is a need or priority may have changed from when you wrote your will.

We give in love and gratitude so that God’s mission continues today, tomorrow and on into the future whether that is our regular giving or a legacy. All gifts are valued and important not just to the church but to God, our maker, redeemer and sustainer. Amen