

21st August 2022, Matins

Isaiah 30: 8-21 and 2 Corinthians 9

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“GENEROSITY OF SPIRIT”

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

As we have just heard in the reading from 2 Corinthians 9:

*“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give **what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.** And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work”*

God loves a cheerful give, a generous person will be enriched, those who are generous are blessed and note that we are asked to give what we have decided **in our hearts** to give. What could be simpler?

Generosity enriches not only the one who receives, but also the one who gives. As we know, giving can make you feel good about yourself. But is that all it's about? Or am I generous just because I want to look good to others, or because it's expected of me, or because I am hoping to get something in return? In fact, do I give simply give to get?

THINGS

I clearly remember the delighted gratitude of a childhood friend of mine when we were about seven. I had unexpectedly given her something that she really wanted, probably a small pink hair-slide or some other treasure that only a little girl would like and I remember her showing it to her mother and saying: ‘Look what kind Lindsay has given me!’ I was surprised and pleased. No one had ever called me kind before, and it gave me a kind of warm glow. At the time this was spontaneous and innocent but it taught me that unexpected acts of generosity can make people like you. Of course, as I grew up, I soon noticed that such acts can also make people suspicious, resentful, jealous and embarrassed! Be careful, generosity can be a two-edged sword.

TIME

And, anyway, it is not just about giving things – how generous are we with our time? Do we take the time to listen to our friends when they need to unload their problems or just let off steam? Can we be bothered to really hear them? What if we find them boring? And what about our enemies or those whom we find difficult? Are we willing to take time to listen to them? May if we did and really listened, we might begin to understand why we find them difficult or why, heaven forbid, they find us difficult! But, often I don't want to waste what I call *my* time. I say I haven't got time to listen just now. But am I really so me-centred that I can't give you the time of day, or night?

LOVE

And what about love? Have I only got enough love for my family, my friends, my neighbours or my nation? Or could I find just a little to share with complete strangers, or even extend some love to my enemies.

Sometimes, when I lead Morning Prayer on Zoom for St John the Baptist, Holland Park, I pray for those who, it seems to me, need love more than most, even if it seems out of place, some who are hated by hundreds, perhaps thousands of people. Mr Johnson, Mr Trump, even Mr Putin, for example. It is easy to pray for those people that we like and admire, but could we possibly be a little more generous? This is not to say I agree, support or admire the policies and actions of these three gentlemen, but I feel in my heart that as God's love is big enough to include them, could we not include them in our prayers? It's not a question of sides. Faith can allow a wider breadth of inclusion.

GOD'S GENEROSITY

How fortunate we are that we have such wonderful examples of generosity set before us. God has bestowed upon us the miraculous gift of life and set us in nature, with its over-abundance of good things, its generous provision for our every need – and His ultimate gift to us was, of course, his Son Jesus Christ.

It is said that all God requires of us is a contrite **heart**. He doesn't need our brilliant ideas or the marvellous things we dream up in our imagination, as He has already thought everything, imagined everything, dreamed everything. He doesn't require us to climb the highest peak, drive the fastest car, acquire the most gold. He is already higher, faster and richer than we could ever be!

All he requires is that we open our hearts and freely give ourselves back to Him. This can only be done through the heart, that generous organ of love which can open to reveal what has to be given back, surrendered for His Name's sake. Amen.