

17th Sunday after Trinity

Gracious God, you call us to fullness of life:
deliver us from unbelief
and banish our anxieties
with the liberating love of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hymns: 195, 687, 667, 273
In Communion: 548, 647

2 Chronicles 24:1-10

Joash was seven years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for forty years. His mother's name was Zibiah; she was from Beersheba.

Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the years of Jehoiada the priest.

Jehoiada chose two wives for him, and he had sons and daughters.

Some time later Joash decided to restore the temple of the Lord.

He called together the priests and Levites and said to them, 'Go to the towns of Judah and collect the money due annually from all Israel, to repair the temple of your God. Do it now.' But the Levites did not act at once.

Therefore the king summoned Jehoiada the chief priest and said to him, 'Why haven't you required the Levites to bring in from Judah and Jerusalem the tax imposed by Moses the servant of the Lord and by the assembly of Israel for the tent of the covenant law?'

Now the sons of that wicked woman Athaliah had broken into the temple of God and had used even its sacred objects for the Baals.

At the king's command, a chest was made and placed outside, at the gate of the temple of the Lord.

A proclamation was then issued in Judah and Jerusalem that they should bring to the Lord the tax that Moses the servant of God had required of Israel in the wilderness.

All the officials and all the people brought their contributions gladly, dropping them into the chest until it was full.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke

Glory to you O Lord

11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy[a] met him. They stood at a distance

13 and called out in a loud voice, 'Jesus, Master, have pity on us!'

14 When he saw them, he said, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were cleansed.

15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him – and he was a Samaritan.

17 Jesus asked, 'Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?' 19 Then he said to him, 'Rise and go; your faith has made you well.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you O Christ

They loved their place of worship.
They longed to see its buildings restored and flourish,
and the message of faith proclaimed near and far.

They knew that none of this could happen without money
and that part of their commitment to the Temple
and ultimately to God
involved them contributing.

But somehow they had just got out of the habit.
There was so much to be concerned about in the country
still rocked by the evils of the old Queen Athaliah –
and peoples personal finances were stretched
by the current economic climate.

And so the focus on planned giving had waned.
And as a result the Temples finances
were getting increasingly stretched.

What they needed was a “prod from God” to get back on track.

In our first reading we heard about how this happened in the kingdom of Judah well over 2,500
years ago.

Messengers were sent out to everyone to remind them
of why they should give
and how they could go about donating now.
And a large chest was placed at the entrance to the Temple
so they could respond as they came to worship.

And we read the people responded positively
bringing their contributions gladly we’re told.
They’d just needed a nudge to encourage them
In their giving to the Temple, and to God.

You know where I’m going with this.
Fast forward over 2,500 years and here we are
grateful to God
for our beautiful buildings
and the ministry and mission of this church.

And knowing that for it to continue and develop money is needed,
Including money from us if we’re a regular member here.

Other than for specific capital projects,
there are no external grants or subsidies we can draw on.
We have to fund all our running costs ourselves
The costs of heating and lighting, maintenance work and salaries
Need to be found from what we between us give.

And like the nation of Judah all those years ago
our outgoings currently exceed our income by quite a bit.
And that’s despite the careful stewardship
of our brilliant and conscientious Treasurer and his team –
I can assure we do not spend carelessly or profligately!

We’re not facing immediate financial ruin
because we have reserves to draw upon,
mainly because of generous legacies over the years.
But we clearly want to get to the point

where our annual income and expenditure balance each other and we don't have to raid our ecclesiastical piggy bank to pay the bills.

And so this month each of us is being asked to review our giving to this church. This is our prod from God.

I expect some may feel uncomfortable that we are being approached so directly about this and in the context of our worship. We may feel its in poor taste to talk about money in church – We think our finances should be a private matter between us and God.

Well yes and no.....

Around 40% of Jesus' parables deal with money— it's His 2nd most popular theme after the kingdom of God - so he clearly felt money was something that could and should be spoken about by religious leaders in faith contexts. But whilst Jesus taught clearly that we should give generously of all that we received from God He did not lay down how much we should give or who to. As with so many topics Jesus did not set hard and fast rules He sought, and seeks, to change our hearts So that in all aspects of our lives, including about our money, each of us prayerfully and sincerely asks "what would you do Jesus if you were me"? And then listens for, and acts upon, the answer we receive.

And that is the pattern I invite us all to follow this month. I invite us each to take the envelope we're given read its contents and take the time to listen to what God is saying to us and then respond.

Some of us may not be part of the planned giving scheme yet and feel called to join it so we are committed to regular donations and the church has more clarity about its level of income going forward.

Others of us may feel called to increase the level of our giving Perhaps aware that it has not kept in line with inflation Or a change in our personal circumstances.

Others still may feel called to make a one-off donation or arrange to mention this church in our will.

And yes, some after prayer, may feel they should reduce the amount they give because of changes in their lives.

Ultimately this is a matter between each of us and God All I, all we, ask

is that you sincerely and prayerfully ask Him what you should do and respond as He calls you to.

Which leads me to our Gospel reading.

10 people healed by Jesus from a terrible disease
10 people running off to the priest as the Jewish law required
to prove they were healed
and could be restored to life in the community.
10 people whose lives were touched profoundly and forever
by the love and grace of God in Jesus.
They all went off to follow the letter of the law
But one was stopped in his tracks
by the enormity of all he had received from Jesus
and just had to come back and say thank you.
He went over and above the minimum asked of him
in response to all he had been blessed with.

As we reflect today on all we have received from God
Including through this beautiful church and wonderful congregation,
the blessings we have received,
I encourage us not to think
What must I give,
what is the minimum I can get away with?
Shall I just file the envelope in the waste paper bin
and not give any more at all?!

Instead I invite us to ask
what in my circumstances can I give,
what am I being called to give
In response to all God has given me by His grace
And as a member of this faith community?

That way like the people of Judah over 2500 years ago,
Like the one leper who returned to Jesus to give thanks
We will give gladly
And our cheerful, prayerful, heartfelt gifts
However large or small
Will gladden God's heart
And help build His kingdom
in this place
at this time.
Amen.