

7th March 2021 10 am MOT: Our Giving

Service led by Revd. Andrew Attwood, including interview with Rosie about the way she approaches giving, reading by Isaac Curtis, talk by Val Whiteman, and Interview with Peter Jackson on church finances. Intercessions by Andrew.

This transcript is only of the two interviews, the reading, the talk and the reflection.

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Interview with Rosie: Christian Giving

[Andrew:] Hi Rosie, good to see you.

[Rosie:] Hi Andrew, good to see you too. How are you?

[Andrew:] I'm very well, thank you. Thank you very much for being here to answer a couple of questions. I just wanted to ask you, with regards to the subject of giving, in what ways do you like to give time and support to people?

[Rosie:] Yeah, well, hospitality is my passion. I love cooking, I love entertaining and I love sharing food. I love to give my time, my energy and ideas. And I feel that when you do hospitality, I like to think I'm a good listener. I'm very patient. So that's the way I give, with hospitality.

[Andrew:] Okay, what motivates you to give to people and to good causes?

[Rosie:] Because I care.

[Andrew:] Okay.

[Rosie:] Giving and helping others, connecting with people, with others, that's really important to me. What motivates me: being kind gives me a sense of belonging.

[Andrew:] Right, okay.

[Rosie:] And it creates a feeling of self-worth, so I feel like I'm doing something. I've always said, it's nice to be nice! It's really nice to be nice. It makes me happy, without a doubt; it's great for my mental well being; and I think it's nice to be a cheerful giver.

[Andrew:] Okay, thank you. Given that you're a Christian, in what ways does serving and giving develop your faith in Jesus?

[Rosie:] Well, in my life I believe as well, I've been blessed, I mean I'm a Christian, but I have been blessed and I've been given many blessings. So I think it's really important to share my blessings with others, I think that's really important. And I look back from when I was very young, because we were a very poor family, and one thing I really do remember when I was growing up was how lots of other people were very kind and generous to us, and they shared things with us. So that's something I sort of learned from a very young age, because it really helped us. And I also remember things like my mum taught us that it's better to give than receive - that sort of thing - so that's been embedded in me so I think being a Christian makes a real big difference, but I think even not being a Christian, you can still be very kind and giving and things like that. So, I'm also encouraged as well, there's a couple of Scriptures which encourage me as well. I think Hebrews 13:16, and it reminds me, and it says, "Do not forget to do good and share with others. For with such sacrifices, God is pleased." And there's another lovely one that I remember, is Proverbs 11:25, "A generous person will prosper. Whoever refreshes others will be refreshed." Just one more, Romans 12:13, "Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." I think that's lovely when the Lord says, you know, we've got to share with everyone, not just Christians but with everybody, as they have needs. That's my passion.

[Andrew:] Thank you, Rosie and thank you for all that you do. Thank you for answering my questions.

[Rosie:] You're welcome. Thank you. Bye bye.

Reading: Luke 21:1-4: The Widow's Offering [GNT]

1 Jesus looked around and saw rich people dropping their gifts in the Temple treasury, 2 and he also saw a very poor widow dropping in two little copper coins. 3 He said, "I tell you that this poor widow put in more than all the others. 4 For the others offered their gifts from what they had to spare of their riches; but she, poor as she is, gave all she had to live on."

Talk: MOT: Giving

[Andrew:] That's great. Thank you, Isaac and Rosie for that. I'm just going to pray now for Val, so she can speak to us. Lord Jesus, we thank you for all the different contributions for today but right now I pray for your Holy Spirit to rest on Val, so that she can guide us into the subject of giving and open up the Scriptures to us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[Val:] Amen.

I don't know about you but I always dread these talks. Because if you aren't careful, what people hear is the sort of begging for money that we get almost daily through the letterbox or on the internet: everyone's on the scrounge for money for worthy causes and we all tend to feel very guilty when we ignore them. And then we get cross that so many people are asking for our hard-earned cash. And it's true you can't give everything to everyone. In all this I say it's very important that God gave us intellects to use, and we need to be very careful to think about these things. Now one of the reasons, I think, that this talk is much more uncomfortable than the MOTs we've already heard on Bible reading or prayer, is it tends to show us really uncomfortably where our trust really lies. So today, I want to go back a couple of steps and think about this from a Biblical perspective. Why is it so important that there are 2,172 texts about giving in the Bible¹. I have to say, so says Google, I haven't counted them and nor, you will be pleased to know, will we be looking at all of them. So right from the start, in the Law, God made it absolutely clear to people that giving wasn't an add-on: that it's an absolute essential, and it seems to be the two things mainly:



Firstly, there are people like the Levites and the priests whom God appoints to serve Him, first in the Tabernacle and ultimately in the Temple.

20 The LORD said to Aaron, 'You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites.

21 'I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting.²

The only work they do is serving God, so they need provision. God therefore establishes that there are people we need to support so that they can serve us.

1 <https://www.thevinechurch.com/sermons/pastor-aaron-dowds-generosity-revolution/>

2 Numbers 18:20-21

And incidentally, how we discern who they should be is something totally different, but also vital. You don't just make your own decision that you want to have an easy life doing nothing but being paid by the church.

Another thing that I realised as I was doing this: did you realise that even Jesus' ministry was supported by giving? It says in Luke³,

1 After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; 3 Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others.

(and this is the important bit)

These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Paul wasn't always supported by the church. You remember in Corinthians he makes it clear that he earned his keep there as a tentmaker, and was not a burden on the infant church there. But when he was with the Philippians, he accepted their support. He says,

14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.

Paul also makes it absolutely clear that financial support doesn't mean that you buy the leader's influence and opinion. And you see that the Philippines give not when they're asked to, but because they perceive a need and they fulfil it. And that's another really important principle, I think.

The second reason that God shows for giving, is there will always be people within the community who can't manage, who will be dependent. And there are lots of texts about giving support to the widows and orphans: two groups which in Biblical times have no power and no ability to work for themselves. And I think we can put in our own 'widows and orphans' group, you don't need to be restricted just to them. And this isn't charity, this isn't giving because we want to feel good about it, but it's an injunction from God to give them what they need, by right. Sadly, like us, the people of God in the Old Testament frequently get it wrong. Isaiah 1 says, 'I'm fed up with your burnt offerings and sacrifices,' says God,

16 'Wash and make yourselves clean.
Take your evil deeds out of my sight;
stop doing wrong.

17 Learn to do right; seek justice.
Defend the oppressed.
Take up the cause of the fatherless;
plead the case of the widow.'

You have to give support to those who can't.

Let's take it a step back even further. The children of Israel, according to the prophets of Jesus, had come to think that they were giving out of the goodness of their hearts, because they were good, they were blessed by God, and they had enough to give. And both the prophets and Jesus make clear that this absolutely isn't so. Fundamental to all giving (and this is the basis) is the fact that God

gives us everything, as Andrew has already said. He created us with talents and abilities. The fallen world means that there are those of us who struggle, but most of us, we are the fortunate ones: we've been created by a God whom we've come to know as our loving Father, who lavishes gifts on us, so it follows that everything we have comes from God, even all that hard-earned money. David says⁴, as he collects material to help Solomon built the temple,

14 'But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.'

However generous we are with our goods, time, talents and money, we're only giving back to God what he's given to us. And so it's an attitude of mind that we should have rather than of purse. Do we really think that God has given everything? Truly? If we did, what difference would it make to us? I've always had a secure job: I worked as a teacher all my life, and I admire tremendously those people who don't have secure jobs, who decide that they want to work for God full-time, and who depend on other people for a living. So I asked a friend from my daughter's church, who works both for the church and for a charity, and so lives, as we would say, by faith, what it felt to rely on God for everything, and this is what she said.

"I think that there's no such thing as some Christians who live by faith and some who don't. We're all dependent on God to provide our needs, whether that's through a salaried job, or through a team of financial supporters. In many ways, the salaried job is more financially precarious because it's all-or-nothing. If you get made redundant, you lose 100% of your income, whereas if some of my supporters dropped out, it only makes a small difference and I'm able to make up the shortfall by inviting people to join my team. It's extremely unlikely that all of my 51 financial supporters would stop giving at the same time. I'm also reassured by the fact that all money is God's money and not ours. If God wants to fund that particular ministry he will. He is the Creator and ruler of the universe. So he's perfectly capable of doing some transfers between bank accounts in the body of Christ.

(I like that bit!)

"I've always taken seriously the challenge to be a cheerful and generous giver myself. And I've really come to experience the truth, that it's more blessed to give than to receive. I feel like I can't expect others to give sacrificially if I'm not doing that myself."

What she says is surprising in some ways. Did you realise that God provides all your needs in the way she says? She quotes from Paul in Corinthians⁵,

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.

What we give or don't give is up to us.

So, at last, how about *our* giving? Let's look at the passage we read. To remind you, Jesus is watching people putting money into the 13 trumpet-shaped offering boxes, each one saying above it where the money was going to go. A poor widow comes and she gives two Lepta [λεπτά], the smallest Jewish coin in circulation. Two ha'pennies. Can you imagine the response from the people watching? "Wow, that'll go a long way!" Yet, Jesus says that her gift was over and above all the other gifts in generosity. She gave all she had. They kept quite a lot for themselves and gave the surplus.

4 in 2 Chronicles 29:14

5 2 Corinthians 9:7

It's of a piece with what Jesus says about the attitudes of religious people. And given that we are religious people, it ought to give us pause. Think about some of the other things that Jesus says to us⁶,

‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former.’

So, again, Jesus is saying, it's an attitude of mind. Yes, yes, yes! Give, give generously! But also think about how and why you give. You're not giving because you're better than anybody else, you're giving because God has blessed you.

So how should we give? Again, Jesus says⁷,

2 ‘So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.’

Again, it comes back to attitude. If we truly believe that God gives us everything, then we should be open-handed to Him. What you give, how much, and where to, is your decision and yours alone. No-one else apart from God should know. Yet the basic principles remain: God's grace to us is limitless: He gives and gives. And as his children, so should we. It's not so much how much we give that defines us, it's how much we keep for ourselves. Paul says,

the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil

in 1 Timothy⁸. And that's a problem for us, as it was in Paul's day. James in his Epistle⁹ upbraids the Christians of his day. And I think this is really telling for us:

15 If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?

How can we be blessed and see other people who are not? God doesn't withhold His blessing, nor should we. John Wesley famously said that the last part of a man's conversion is his wallet. He also said, "Earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can."

I feel that this difficult year has been a time of rebalancing and looking at where we are with God. There are always times when we should be thinking about where we are with Him. For me it's been a time to think about how much of me really belongs to Him. He seems to say, "So, give me the keys to the attic and to the basement of your life. And by the way, also to that little cupboard under the stairs where the mess is stored." Everything belongs to Him, including the bank files and the filing cabinets. A final reminder, then, that God gives with open hands, grace on grace. We have responsibilities to our brothers and sisters in Christ, and we are defined by what we keep, not by what we give. So let's end with David's words¹⁰, which we often use at the time of the Offertory. You might like to say them with me.

6 Matthew 23:23

7 Matthew 6:2-4

8 1 Timothy 6:10

9 James 2:15-16 [RSV]

10 in 1 Chronicles 29:11 [NIVUK] and verse 14 [NRSV]

- 11 Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power
and the glory and the majesty and the splendour,
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.
- 14 ... and of your own have we given you.

Amen.

Interview with Peter: Church Finances

And now we listen to Peter Jackson, our treasurer.

[Andrew:] Hi Peter, how are you?

[Peter:] Very fine, thank you very much.

[Andrew:] Good. I just wanted to use this time to ask you a few questions and we can have a bit of a conversation about the subject of giving, and particularly that angle of generosity, and I just wondered, we've talked about this before, why do you think we have a privilege of being generous? Tell me what your thoughts are.

[Peter:] Okay. Couple of things really, Andrew. I think, really, our generosity has been one of the many ways in which we can respond to our generous God. He clearly unconditionally loves and cares for us. And you know what? As well, we are amongst the wealthiest 2% of the global population, we've been incredibly blessed, and part of our Christian faith is using that blessing to bless others in turn. Our giving should reflect God's care for the whole of His creation. That means people, and the rest of the whole natural world. But also, you know, our generosity is part of our spiritual journey, our talents and resources can do a lot when they're active; and I think as human beings, we resource what we believe in. You know what? We just cannot outgive God, however hard we try.

[Andrew:] I think that's true, it's an amazing thing to remember.

So, what would you say, though, is the Scriptural basis for generosity?

[Peter:] Okay, I don't want to say too much here, other than to mention that there are 272 verses of the Bible relating to belief, 372 verses about prayer, 714 verses on love and incredibly 2,161 on giving¹¹. I didn't sit down and count those, I did find it from somewhere. I just think those are some incredible numbers to bear in mind.

[Andrew:] Wow. Over 2,000 on giving: that's absolutely phenomenal. Given that this subject is to do with us as a local church, could you give us a bit of a summary on how you think St John's Church finances are looking at the moment?

[Peter:] Sure, of course, I'd be very happy to do that, Andrew. Since 2018 we've been slowly recovering from a very non-sustainable financial position. And when I say non-sustainable, we were in not a very good shape. We have challenged costs from our existing providers such as the insurance, utilities, heat, light, communications and building services. In that time we've managed to reduce the cost on a recurring basis, by between £8,000 and £10,000 a year, that represents ongoing savings of around 10% of our variable cost base. That's £40,000 to £50,000 over a five-year period, which is quite significant, I believe. Our regular monthly income from donors by standing order has been robust during the COVID crisis: there has been a decline of around 8%. Collections from 2020 were around 40% of the 2019 levels. This is due primarily I believe, to having no services during most of the year. Hall income is of course down significantly. Besides the savings on the cost base we have had savings in 2020 as mainly the utilities and services we paid for have been at far lower levels, such as heating and cleaning. You know what, Andrew? Well, you do know this, but it's worth remembering that we didn't furlough any staff, and I've valued the way that the staff that we do have have adapted to the new working practices during COVID.

11 <https://slideplayer.com/slide/4528116/>

[Andrew:] That's very interesting. We've had a lot to adjust to, but it's helpful to have a summary of where we are now.

Given all of that, where do you think the major challenges will be for church finances, looking into the future over the next, say, five years or so?

[Peter:] Sure. Well I think one of the prime things that will be determining what the new normal is, there's been so much disruption in everything we've been very used to over the COVID year, but you know what? So far we've been quite immune to many of the financial consequences of the COVID crisis. Attrition of our monthly donations has been due primarily to leavers and movers. If we assume the crisis diminishes during 2021, we don't yet know what sort of short-term economic consequences there will be. The furlough scheme will eventually end and many businesses and individuals' incomes I'm sure will be impacted. I think the impact on individuals could be quite significant, which will of course impact the church finances. And of course there's one thing that we really do need to bear in mind and that's demographics. It's clear that we're all getting older, and as many of our donors approach retirement their donation levels will probably be impacted. And I really think we need to think about how we can backfill some of those gaps that we will inevitably see over the coming years.

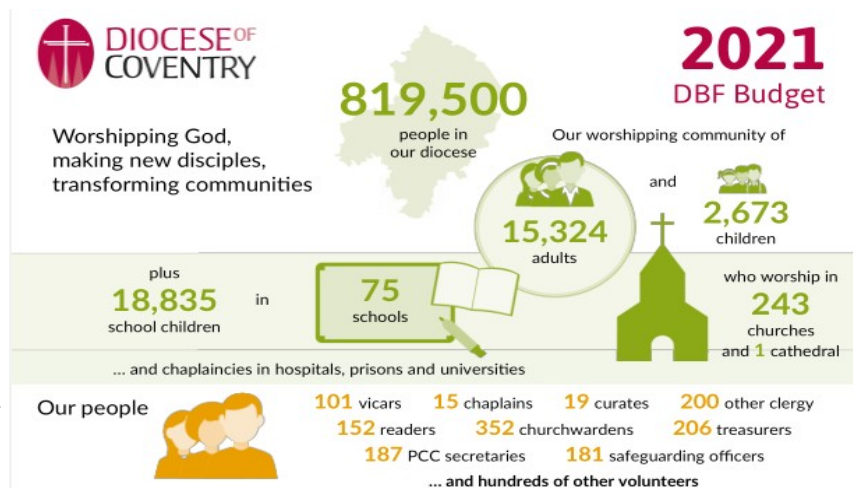
[Andrew:] OK. I think it is important to start thinking about demographics, you're right.

In the meantime, though, I wonder if you could give me some positive examples where you can see generosity making a positive difference?

[Peter:] Of course, I'd be very happy to do that, Andrew. So I guess many of you probably know that besides being the treasurer of St. John's, I have been the treasurer of Kenilworth Uyogo Friendship Link for a number of years. As far as I can determine, St John's has generously supported this charity in its work to provide medical and educational support to Uyogo in Tanzania over the 40 years since this charity was set up with John Radford as a driving influence. In 2020 we partnered with Richard Dickson, Mayor of Kenilworth for a town-wide appeal to purchase bicycles to assist girls at the recently opened secondary school to travel safely each day from their home to school. Some girls will get to 36 kilometres each day, and risked dangers that we can't imagine. As a result of the generosity of people in Kenilworth, on the 16th of February, 66 brand new bikes were delivered to 66 enthusiastic girls. This will make an amazing difference to those girls' lives, opening up opportunities to study and achieve education will literally transform their lives. We aim to fund another 50 bikes before Richard's Mayoral duties are over, but I think this is just a demonstration of how the generosity of people in Kenilworth has made a difference or will make a difference to the lives of girls in Uyogo. So I think that's a really exciting example.

[Andrew:] Wonderful.

[Peter:] Another example I've got is, you know, one of the major outgoings in St John's is the Diocesan Quota, otherwise known as the Parish Share. This is our contribution to the costs of ministry and community support to the diocese. There are over 15,000 worshipping adults and contact with 2,500 children in the diocese. There are 243 churches, 101 vicars, 15 chaplains and 200 other clergy. The annual diocesan budget is



around £9.1 million, which is an average of £600 per worshipping adult each year. Around 60% of the diocesan outgoings are resourced from Diocesan Quota, with most of the remainder being funded from investments and other income. We can be proud at St. John's that our contributions to the Diocesan Quota fully meet our average share of the diocesan cost. This means that the diocese can use other sources of income to support and subsidise other parishes and projects in places that are not as privileged as we are. I think this is a privilege, not a burden.

[Andrew:] I think that's really heartening.

[Peter:] Yeah. And then finally Andrew, you know we're beneficiaries of St. John's of the vision and generosity of previous generations. For example, St. John's from when it was first built through many changes in its distant and recent history. I believe firmly that it's our responsibility to create a legacy to ensure the mission of the church and its community is well-resourced for those who come after us, so they can benefit as we have done.

[Andrew:] That's superb. Really good helpful examples there.

I wonder, Peter, perhaps to finish with, if there were any other resources, any other things we could look at to help us with our thinking about generosity.

[Peter:] You know, as I've thought and prayed through this whole subject over the last few weeks, you know, I've been mindful of a video that is on YouTube about Mizoram, 'A Handful of Rice'¹², a real inspiration is the way that the generosity of people in Mizoram have just developed some generosity amongst themselves and, you know, sort of just the way they live. Also, I've found four Bible studies on stewardship which comes from the Diocese of Southwark. It's entitled '*God's Generosity: Our Response*'. I think that's well worth looking at, especially for home groups that may be looking for some study themes. And also if you can get hold of the main March 2020 edition of the *Christianity* magazine, there are reports of interviews entitled 'How I Spend It'. These are interviews with four Christians discussing what they do with their money.

[Andrew:] That's all really helpful. Thank you.

[Peter:] No thank you, thank you, Andrew and everyone for the opportunity to share some of these thoughts. Of course, if anyone has any questions or comments, they can contact me by the treasurer's email address available on the church website.

You know, we do face challenging times but let's remember how privileged we all are. Thank you Andrew.

[Andrew:] Thank you ever so much, Peter. That was really helpful. Thanks. Good to speak to you.

[Peter:] And you too. Thank you. Have a great day everybody. Bye.

Prayerful Reflection

[Andrew:] Thank you, that was really great stuff from both Val and Peter. I'm aware that there's a lot of information there to process, so I thought we would just have a minute of quiet, just to let some of that information settle in our hearts, so let's just be still.

Let's turn our attention to the presence of God with us. Let's continue to pray.

Father God, we've heard a lot of examples from Scripture, and even from recent experience locally as to how money is important. Father, I want to thank you for the many people who already give to this local church, Lord. Thank You for the generosity that already is. And I want to pray, Lord, for Your blessing on all the different people who contribute financially and

12 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_tqQXiKD8

practically in ways of service, all the different expressions of giving. Bless all who give.

Thank You, Lord, for that amazing quote from John Wesley, where he talks about earning as much as you can, so you can save as much as you can, so you can give as much as you can. He was a man of great ambition and changed the country. We pray now for a heart transplant. I pray, Lord, that You would give us Your heart when it comes to the subject of giving. We remember, Lord, the emphasis that Val brought, that this is to do with attitude. Again in a moment of quiet, would You help us to examine our attitude and to be open to receive Your attitude to giving.

And Lord Jesus, for those of us who earn, for those of us with some kind of income, we remember again, everything we have comes from You. Everything we have comes from You. So, of Your own do we give back to you now. In our hearts we realign ourselves to join in with Your generosity, because You command it, because You are like us.

So once again, Lord, thank You for the generosity that already exists in our church. And I pray that if you have other things to say, or remind us of us as individuals to upgrade any giving or change what we do in terms of our giving, I pray that we will be honest with ourselves and with You. And if we need any advice, I pray that we would take up Peter Jackson's offer to explore ways of helping in terms of local giving. Amen.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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