

CHRISTIAN GIVING

A Presentation by Canon Peter Sills 4 May 2025.

[This is the commentary that accompanied Peter's slides.]

1 **Stepping into the New**

On the Sunday after David's farewell I spoke about the new situation in which we find ourselves. We know a little more about that following Tessa's announcement last Sunday. We know the vacancy is likely to last at least a year, that pastoral reorganisation is planned, and until that is completed we shall have a priest-in-charge, not a vicar. The difference is that a priest-in-charge does not have tenure, and this makes reorganisation easier. I was a priest-in-charge for eight years in Barnes, and it made no practical difference to the parish nor to my ministry.

We know also that our finances are not in good shape. It would be very unfair to greet a new priest with the message that they have to sort out the money. *We need to do that now.* So today I think I have to say something about giving. Not everyone is happy when a priest preaches about money, especially when it's our money. It touches on a sore point – we may feel we should give more, and don't like being reminded! And that's fair enough. I find it uncomfortable too, and I'm not here to make us feel guilty or uncomfortable.

But this parish is in a bit of a hole financially, and it would be wrong not to respond. So, I'm going to look at what the Bible says about giving to God, and what that might mean for our individual giving to the parish.

2 **Gospel Reading : *John 21.1-14***

In the gospel reading we heard about Jesus' resurrection appearance at the lakeside. The disciples were fishing and had not had much luck. But Jesus could see what the disciples in the boat could not. He told them to cast their net to starboard and they would make a good catch. I take from this the message: Follow Jesus' teaching and you will receive a rich harvest.

3 **Liminal space**

When David left, I likened our situation to a liminal space, that is, an in-between time, when we are at a threshold and have to wait.

4 **An active waiting**

Waiting in a liminal space is not a *passive* waiting, but an *active* waiting. We're not waiting for some thing to be done to us, but preparing for *our* next step into the new. Being in a liminal space gives us time to sort things out.

5 **Money**

One of the main things we need to sort out is the level of giving. As we have known for some time, there needs to be a marked increase in personal giving.

6 **Biblical standard**

The biblical standard for giving to God is the tithe – 10%. There are many references to this in the Bible. This is one example –

7 **The Tithe**

A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord. Every tithe of the herd and flock – every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod – will be holy to the Lord. (Leviticus 27.30 & 32)

This was written for an agrarian economy. Today, we need to read it as relating to our income – which is what produce and flocks represented in the OT world.

8 **Giving is part of worship**

We worship God with our goods as well as in our hearts:

Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine. (Proverbs 3.9 & 10)

9 **Not just paying the bills**

Christian giving is not just about paying the bills. We give to God as we give to someone we love. When we choose a gift for someone who is special to us, we don't calculate what they need, but we give something that shows them just how special they are to us. We give generously, and we give lovingly. That's how we should give in thanksgiving to God.

10 **Give generously : Reap generously**

This was St Paul message to the Corinthians:

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

(2 Corinthians 9.6)

11 **Example of Jesus**

Giving generously is to follow the example of Jesus. St Paul put it like this:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

(2 Corinthians 8.9)

12 **Giving is a free choice**

Paul also makes it clear that giving is a free choice. At the same time he is clear that how much we give reflects the level of our earnestness (that is our seriousness) about our faith:

I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 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.

13 **Proportional Giving**

Paul commends the principle of **Proportional Giving**

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income.

(2 Corinthians 9.6)

Christian giving is not about just giving something, a token, like tapping the card machine and giving £10, or whatever it's set at. Christian giving means giving an amount that reflects our financial worth.

14 **How much should I give?**

Paul doesn't give advice on how much, except that it should be in proportion to income. As a devout Jew, a Pharisee, he will have had in mind the Biblical principle of a Tithe.

15 **C of E : Half-tithe**

Some years ago, the Church of England recommended the half-tithe as the standard for giving today.

Tithing remains the basic principle – Christians should tithe their income – but today, unlike when *Leviticus* was written, there are many good causes doing the kind of humanitarian work that the Church pioneered. The half-tithe reflects our support of those charities and good causes.

16 **How does it work?**

To give an idea of how it works, this example is based on average earnings in the UK, currently around £30,000 p.a.

The half-tithe is based on net income, that is income after tax.

| | |
|----------------------|---------|
| Average earnings (E) | £30,000 |
| Pers allowance (A) | £12,570 |
| Taxable amount (E-A) | £17,430 |
| Tax @ 20% (T) | £ 3486 |
| Net income (E-T) | £26,524 |
| Half-tithe 5% (H) | £ 1326 |
| Giving per month | £ 110 |
| Giving per week | £ 25.50 |

17 Potential Income

I asked myself what difference giving at this level of generosity would have on our finances? What if everybody who feels sufficiently connected to the Beacon parish to be on the Electoral Roll gave a half-tithe?

The result would be dramatic:

| | | |
|------------------|--------|----------|
| Half-tithe 5% | (H) | £ 1326 |
| Electoral roll | (R) | 111 |
| Potential income | (HxR) | £147,186 |

18 Actual income

How does this compare with our actual income?

| | |
|-------------------------|----------|
| Potential income (HxR) | £147,186 |
| Planned Giving 2024 | £65,000 |
| Shortfall | £82,186 |

We are generating *less than half of our potential income*.

19 Problems of averaging

A note of caution: averaging does not take account of individual circumstances. People on low incomes may be struggling to keep afloat, so we can't expect them to give a half-tithe, but those with high incomes can be expected to give more.

Again, Paul is clear:

Give eagerly according to your means. God does not ask for what we don't have. There is no question of giving at the cost of hardship to yourselves; it is a question of equality.

(2 Corinthians 8.12-14)

20 A Guide in tough times

Faced with tough times, we need a guide as how to deal with it fairly. That's what I've aimed to do in this presentation.

The half-tithe is my guide. I ask each of you: Can you move towards it?

You have to decide. I'm not making judgements. As your bother in Christ, I am asking:

Can you improve your response to God financially and help the Parish improve its mission?

21 **What could we do?**

We live in a world where you need money, as well as people, to do things. A better income is essential if we are to improve our outreach. Here are three examples:

- It would be wonderful, and make a difference to many young lives, if we were able to employ our own Youth Minister.
- It would be great to free our priest for pastoral ministry by employing a parish secretary / administrator
- And it would be a relief not to be constantly worrying about finding the funds for repairs and maintenance to make our three churches welcoming places.

22 **Right person? Right resources**

I end where I began: if we want our new priest to feel welcome and free to reach out to the parish, we have to offer the right resources, and not present them with a financial challenge.

23 **An active waiting**

The vacancy is a time of active waiting, and there is a great spirit evident among us. Jesus calls each of us to do our part in sorting things out in readiness for the new chapter to which, together, we look forward. *Do as Jesus teaches and you will have a rich harvest.*

We can do it!