

As a member of the stewardship committee it is my job this day to speak to your good selves about giving in grace. Today, I am going to tackle the subject of mission giving. My father always warned me never to discuss religion, politics or money in polite company. So I'm in big trouble. Be gentle!

Over these weeks, the stewardship committee is asking you to consider your Christian giving. Our Church is running in deficit and needs more money and we are asking our congregation to join our planned giving fund or consider an increase if you are already members and are able...but there is more to Christian giving than supporting the Church and it's immediate community. Currently, the mission giving of this Parish is 0.65%, we can't afford to support missions around the world. I know we could argue that 'charity begins at home', but, I ask you to consider, is that really following the teachings of Jesus?...is that really God's will? Jesus taught us to love our neighbour, did he mean just the people in this Church, in this town, or did he mean all God's people...every soul upon this Earth?

Our reading today reminds us that we ourselves are tenants of God. God has provided us with food, money and abilities. But we must remember that our generous God loans these things to us. We can't, after all, take any of it with us. In the end, all that we have is our souls and if they are full of love, we will enter the kingdom of Heaven rich. I believe, God is always calling us to help others. We need to ask ourselves: Do we ignore him when we consider how we spend our money and use our talents? Or do we prayerfully ask him to help us handle our money in keeping with his teachings? Not just as individuals, but as a Church, as a society of Christians and as human beings.

Money is always an uncomfortable subject, especially so in the current economic climate. There are always bills to pay, something to save for, or an upcoming event looming. However, we must remember that in this country, we are, in many ways, very blessed. In the world today there are millions of families that live on less than £1 a day. Just £1 a day...it's hard for me to imagine poverty like that. It makes me thankful for all the blessings in my life. Grateful that my children have fresh water, good food, warm clothes, access to health care and education. I thank God for that everyday for there are so many millions of children who have none of these things. God knows all their names....and we would like to introduce you to a few of them now.

Children read out descriptions of children that need sponsorship.

These children aren't figments of my imagination. These are real children, living in real poverty and every one of them is looking for a sponsor today through Compassion UK. Compassion is a Christian charity that helps children out of poverty in some of the poorest countries in the world one of the charities our Church could support, if we have the funds. More children could be rescued from poverty, provided with an education, regular health check ups and a loving community with Christ and God's gifts could be shared more equally in this world.

I'd like to introduce you to one more child. This is Maniraghua, she's 10 years old and lives in a rural area of Rwanda, her parents earn less than £20 a month as laborers. I sponsor her through compassion and she attends the project there where she receives education, health

checks and learns about Jesus. This was her first letter to me. She told me that her favourite food is rice and meat, she shared with me that she wants to be a teacher when she's grown up and that her favourite Psalm is Psalm 23. The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...an astounding choice for one who has so little. I treasure her letters, as I know she treasures mine. Sponsoring Manirughua helps me as much as it helps her. Her courage and spirit humbles me.

I have been on a bit of a journey the past few months and I actually have a confession to make...I am not currently a planned giver. I am a regular donor to Tearfund and I sponsor Maniraguha through Compassion UK but I give nothing to this Parish except my time and I thought that was enough. But I'm going to change that today, these are the letters that are going out to every person who attends this Church.... I have filled in my response sheet...and mine will be the first one in the box. I am going to donate to our Church so that we can continue to do work in our community, but so we can also realise our hope of raising our mission giving, first to 5% and then to 10% and also help the communities of the world that are in desperate need.

You may not be in a position to give money. And that's perfectly fine, God knows your bank balance. He knows if there's no wiggle room in your finances. Just remember that Christian giving is about living a Christian life not just on Sundays but in every moment of every day. Giving time, love and consideration to others. A smile in the street, a food bank donation, a few pounds in a charity box. Every act of kindness and love counts.

This week you will receive a letter from the Church asking you to consider your planned giving. Please consider this prayerfully and respond as your heart tells you to. Also, if you are looking to increase your mission giving and are interested in sponsoring one of the children we spoke about today please come and see us and take that step and change a child's life, in Jesus' name.

Amen