

THE GENEROUS LIFE | HIGHER THINKING

20 June 2021

Is 55: 1-13 1 Cor 16: 1-4

Rev'd Chris Johnson

Over the last couple of months at Parish Council we have been doing a review of our mission giving. As a Council we made a determination that we would like to be a Church where we give at least 12% of the Offertory income figure to mission. So whenever our individual giving fell below this we would top it up. When we actually sat down and worked out the mission giving that comes from your direct giving to "the mission of the week" we found that it is currently running at the rate of 13% of Offertory.

This says to me that this is a mission hearted church and that people are committed to giving to God's wider mission as well as to the ministry and mission of the local parish. It says to me this is a church committed to the Great Commission and the making of disciples of all nations. And it is a great example of the generosity we've been talking about in this series.

This is the third and final week in our series, "The Generous Life- becoming a more giving person."

ISAIAH 55

The people of God are in exile in Babylon. Previously, the people had known good times under King David and King Solomon. The nation was economically and spiritually prosperous at that time. But then there was a succession of bad kings who compromised the nation's faith and trust in Yahweh. The moral fibre of the nation declined and they found themselves overrun by Assyria and then Babylon. The people were taken off into exile in Babylon.

This is a devastating time for the people of God so the prophet Isaiah is raised up to interpret it for them. He points out to them their predicament is because of disobedience, but he also reassures them that God has not forgotten them and he will be faithful to his covenant.

Isaiah calls the people to higher thinking.

In vv 8 & 9 he says, *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,"* declares the Lord. *"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."* (That's a great memory verse to have stored away for the day of trouble, when everything is going wrong) That was the situation of the people in exile and they needed to know that God was still with them. That God had a purpose in mind bigger than their current circumstances and if they were prepared to trust him and to repent they would catch a glimpse of -this better way, this Godly thinking;
-this higher way, this higher thinking.

The Prophet calls the people back to God...

"Come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!" Is Isaiah talking about God providing for his people physically or spiritually? I think it is both.

-Isaiah is pointing to a time when they will return to the promised land and once again enjoy the wine and milk the land produces. God will provide for their physical needs.

-But Isaiah is also pointing to the fact that our deepest human needs cannot be met by just satisfying our physical appetites. We need God to touch those deeper needs. V2 says, *"Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy?"* It talks about 'delighting in the richest of fare' which is about an intimate relationship with God.

In the Old Testament relationship with God is expressed in terms of covenant. The nation of Israel was called to be in a covenant relationship with God. There were a number of covenants in the Old Testament, but in v3 the Prophet reminds the people about the covenant with King David. It is an everlasting covenant based on God's faithful love promised to David. Isaiah wants to reassure the people that although they are in exile, God has not forgotten his promises to them through the Davidic covenant.

God is saying that if you return to the covenant

- your thirst will be satisfied,
- the hunger of your soul will be filled,
- you will delight in the richest of fare.

Most people today have the same misguided thinking of the people of Isaiah's day. They think that spending their money on their physical needs will give them the satisfaction they are looking for in life. This is faulty thinking. True human satisfaction comes from having a relationship with your Creator and knowing where you are heading in eternity.

At the moment you may feel like the people of Isaiah's day. You may feel like you are in Exile. Perhaps life is really tough and there not too many things going your way. You start to question if God really loves you and you wonder if living for him is really worth it. This is how the people of God must have felt living in exile in Babylon.

The prophet Isaiah is wanting to reframe the people's thinking. Read vv 8 & 9

God's perspective is much bigger than ours. We can trust him to look out for our welfare even when the immediate circumstances are difficult. He will provide food for the hungry and water for those who are thirsty. He will provide both physically and spiritually for our needs. He will keep his covenant promises such as those given to David.

However, the important response required of us is in Read vv 6 & 7

This is a call to repentance and faith and it is essential, to tap into the rich spiritual food God wants to make available to his people. Repentance is not just about turning away from sin; it's also about turning towards something, turning towards God; to the one who says *"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; come, buy and eat!"* Repentance is about turning towards that which truly satisfies feasting deeply in what God provides.

In the New Covenant God's provision is Jesus. He is one who also said COME, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

Are you weary? Are you thirsty? Are you hungry? God wants to provide for you abundantly in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a wonderful message and one that our world desperately needs to hear because at the moment people are looking in all the wrong places.

Moving into the second half of the year we want to get much more focused on how we get that message out into the community. We want to prayerfully explore what God is calling us to do in mission.

We are already committed to mission in Peregrin and hope to be able to make an appointment in the second half of the year. But this is just the start. We need to lift our mission focus across the whole of the district.

I see this mission as being involvement in the community to bless the community with our loving service and evangelism. We want to meet people's immediate needs and we want to hold up to people the good news of Jesus inviting them to put their faith in him. I believe both loving service and the evangelism go hand in hand and there is great synergy in tackling both. Loving service builds a relationship with an unbelieving community and as trust develops the gospel can be shared.

- If we only do loving service without evangelism people never get their deepest hungers met. And they miss out on Isaiah's message of the possibility of covenant relationship with God.
- If we only do evangelism and not loving service, then we can easily be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal and mostly people will just ignore us as irrelevant.

We need both.

In the second half of the year we will be setting up a process which will help us all to pray and seek the Lord about what he is calling us to do in his great mission.

I want to let you know that I have already been to visit our State Member Sandy Bolton and Mayor Clare Stewart. I have been asking them the question what are the major needs in our community because we as a church want to bless our community. I've been to a Social Services Network meeting organised by the Noosa Council. This was a

great opportunity to hear about all of the community organisations and what they are doing to meet needs in the community. I was able to share about our Samaritans ministry and care for families through the Chaplains in our schools. I know in this church there are many people involved in many different community groups and you will bring your knowledge and insight to bare on the needs of our community and where God might be calling us to find our place in service.

There are also many of you who have had experience in evangelism. We need to pray and seek God about the best way to present Christ in a way that people can connect with and want to put their faith in him. Lynda and I have had experience with Alpha and some of you have also used Alfa before; but I know there is much other material out there as well which others will be aware of, but we need to pray and seek God about what is appropriate for Sunshine Beach, Tewantin, and Peregrine in 2021.

But my friends whatever God might be calling to us to do through this process it will need resourcing. This Generosity series is the opportunity to make sure we are well resourced as a church so that we can plan our mission outreach with confidence.

I Corinthians 16:1-4

The Apostle Paul had a great heart for both loving service and evangelism. And as well as being a great theologian he was also very practical. We read today the first four verses of 1Corinthians16. Paul is talking about the collection for the Saints in Jerusalem. He has a loving heart for God's people there who have suffered a drought and are in great physical need of food. Paul is concerned to meet that need.

But Paul also has a great heart for evangelism. My mind immediately goes to 2 Corinthians 5 in verse 20 *"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God."* So the apostle is concerned for both spiritual needs and physical needs.

In 1Corinthians 16:1-4, Yes it is about the collection for the Saints in Jerusalem, but he also gets very practical with three simple points.

Giving should be

1. Regular – on the first day of every week.
2. Proportional – in keeping with your income.
3. Secure – men who they approve will be the ones who take the gift to Jerusalem.

Let's look at each of these principles in our situation.

1. Regular I do encourage you to make a pledge to God's work. Giving can be a weekly, fortnightly or monthly. In the past people have used cash or envelopes. We do now encourage you to move to electronic giving through direct debit giving or the QR Code. Paul encourages the Corinthians to make a regular gift and we do too, whatever method you might choose.
2. Proportional the Apostle Paul exhorts the Corinthians to set aside a sum of money in keeping with their income. He's not asking them to give money they haven't got. I want to encourage you with percentage giving I think the real sign of generosity is found in the percentage or proportion we give away rather than the absolute amount of the gift. As the apostle Paul says here put aside some money in keeping with your income.
3. Secure –we have Wardens and a Treasurer and Parish Council to oversee all the financial affairs of our church. We are also regulated by the canons of the Anglican Church Southern Queensland. You can always talk to the Wardens or Treasurer if you have any questions about the finances of our Church

I invite you to show generosity in your regular committed gift to your church to sustain and grow all the wonderful ministries that God has given us here at Noosa Anglican, but also to especially expand our mission outreach in both loving service and evangelism.

God speaking through the prophet Isaiah wanted His people to be in intimate relationship with himself. So he says to them *"Come, all you thirsty, come to the waters ...v2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, you will delight in the richest of fare."*

Prayer

Lord thank you for your abundant provision in Christ. Soften our stony hearts that we might come with our thirsty and hungry souls and find that you truly satisfy. And give us a heart for others to find this richest of fare as well. For Jesus sake and His glory. Amen