

**The GENEROUS Life**  
**Head and Heart**  
Amos 5: 5-27   2 Cor 8:8-15  
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A local charity had never received a donation from the town's richest businessman so the Director of the charity made a phone call. "We know that your business is very successful, yet you haven't given anything to our charity," said the Director. "Wouldn't you like to give back to the community?"

The businessman replied, "Did you also know that my mother is ill, with extremely expensive medical bills? Or that my brother is blind and unemployed? Or that my sister's husband died, leaving her broke with four kids?"

"I...I...I... had no idea." said the Director.

"So," said the businessman, "If I don't give them any money, why would I give any to you?"

This morning we begin our series "The Generous Life— becoming a more giving person."

I'm sure we would all like to be more generous. It's just a case of how?

Well it's very simple really- just give more away.

But maybe to answer the how question we need to first of all answer the WHY question?

Christians are called to be generous because God is generous. All believers agree that God is generous. Everyone believes that in their head but the real question is do we believe it in our hearts? Because if we believe it in our hearts it will move us to action.

In our readings this morning we find two believing communities who believed in the generosity of God in their head, but only one who believed it in their heart.

The two communities are eighth century BC Israel and first century Corinth. Eighth century Israel believed in their head God is generous but it didn't work down into their hearts. First century Corinth believe it in both their head and their heart.

Let's look first at **eighth century Israel**. This story is found in the book of Amos.

In Amos 5:21ff we read that the people loved their religious festivals and assemblies, they brought burnt offerings and grain offerings, we would assume according to the law of Moses. They had lots of lovely music in their worship -they enjoyed singing God's praises to the accompaniment of the harp.

However it seems that God was not happy with their worship and he says "*I hate I despise your religious festivals. I cannot stand your assemblies.*" (v21) He will not accept their sacrificial offerings. He doesn't want to listen to the music of their harps.

So what is it that makes God so cross with them about their worship? Verse 24 holds the clue. "But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never failing stream!" The people offer wonderful worship but there is no justice in Israel and the people are not living in the righteous way God requires.

To understand this we have a look back at verse 11; there was a special tax placed on the poor for their straw and their grain. And in many other places in the book, Amos details the way the poor are being oppressed.

Amos 8:4-6   READ

I don't advise you buy your bread made with the wheat from that shop. [Go through verses.] The poor are oppressed!

There is no justice in the nation. Back in Ch5 look at verses 7, 10 & 12, there is no justice in the courts, people take bribes and the innocent and poor are deprived of justice.

To sum this up the people are in church on Sunday doing all the things that would indicate they love God however on Monday to Friday they are oppressing the poor with their business practices and the legal system is corrupt.

What's more if you look at verse 13 the whole system suppresses opposition. You better keep quiet about it if you want to get on. To move up the ladder you have to be corrupt like those around you. This was not God's plan for His people and he is not happy with them and especially the pretense of their worship.

V23 & 24 READ

### **First century Corinth**

Paul's two epistles to the Church in Corinth reveal a church with some big problems but also a Church having a lot going for it.

We know about the problems—division, lawsuits, sexual immorality and lack of discipline around the Lord's Supper. However the church also had a lot to commend it. (2 Cor 8) Chapters 8 & 9 The collection for the saints in Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 8:7 Paul commends the Corinthians for excelling in faith, speech, knowledge, earnestness and love.

In verse 9 they *"know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."*

In verse 10 he commends them being

- the first to have the desire to give and
- the first to actually give

to this special collection for the poor in Jerusalem.

In verse 24 we see that the apostle Paul was very proud of the Corinthians because of the generosity they showed in their first response to this appeal.

Chapter 9:2 Paul tells them he has been boasting to the Macedonians about their eagerness to help.

So the Corinthian Church had a lot to commend it; it seems there was a spontaneous generosity amongst the believers.

What was the worship like in the church in Corinth? We are not told exactly but I think exuberant and enthusiastic would be two words that could be used to describe it. In 1 Corinthians 10 things seem to have been getting a little out of hand at Holy Communion and in Chapters 12 to 14 we find the famous chapters on Spiritual Gifts. The Corinthians are enthusiastic to use their spiritual gifts and especially in worship, but unfortunately with a sense of pride rather than love. Paul commended them for their openness to the Holy Spirit but challenges them to not forget that most excellent gift of love. (1 Cor 13)

I suspect the Christian worship was just as enthusiastic as the worship in 8th century Israel, however, unlike Israel their worship did find some practical application in their everyday lives. They knew Jesus as Lord in their heads and this worked its way down to their hearts through their willingness to give to the appeal for the saints in Jerusalem, not just once but twice. They showed great generosity.

## SO

Would you be more at home with the people of God in eighth century Israel or the people of God in first century Corinth? Well I hope we are more like first century Corinth minus the bad bits.

At Noosa Anglican we are wanting to build a church with a faith that is both head and heart. We want our faith to work its way down from our head into our hearts such that it makes a difference in our daily lives.

Our Noosa Anglican mission is to Glorify God by making Disciples as we love and serve Noosa. We want to proclaim this on our lips and act on it in our lives. We want to be generous in making it happen.

In practical terms, what might this generosity look like?

In eighth century Israel - in broad terms the people were expected to give 10% of their income. Leviticus made it very clear they were expected to give - a 10<sup>th</sup> of the grain from the soil, a 10<sup>th</sup> of the fruit from the trees and a 10<sup>th</sup> of the animals from the flock.

They were also expected to not harvest to the edges of their fields but leave some for the poor to glean.

Every seven years they were expected to cancel debts... so that no one would become poor through over indebtedness.

This was all built into their law to encourage generosity.

In the Apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthians he doesn't directly teach tithing and nowhere in the rest of New Testament are Christians exhorted to tithe. Sometimes people ask me, "Are Christians meant to tithe?" I say to them, 'Christians are exhorted to be generous.' But it seems to me that if 10% was the accepted standard for the people of God in the Old Covenant then it is a reasonable starting point for Christians in the New Covenant. In the Old Testament all they had was Moses and the 10 commandments, the Torah, the law. The revelation we've been given is Jesus Christ. We have God come in the flesh full of grace and truth. Our revelation is more wonderful and more glorious, so surely our giving should be more generous.

But 10% is not binding, however it is a great guide for Christians. You may give more or less. For a pensioner 10% is a big sacrifice. For someone on a six figure sum it shouldn't be that big a deal? If a pensioner puts \$50 in the plate and someone on over \$100,000 a year puts \$50 in the plate, who is the more generous? It is the one who gives the higher % or proportion of their income.

One thing I would encourage you to do is to work out the percentage you give. It is the proportion that you give away that is the real indicator of generosity. It's very easy to think the coin you drop in the Salvos tin is generous if it makes a good rattle when it hits the bottom but the real question is what proportion is it of the money God has put at your disposal.

One principle I have regularly taught over the years is graduated tithing. This is where you seek to push your percentage a little higher each year.

- If God has blessed you financially in a year then show greater generosity the next year by increasing your %.
- If you've had a difficult year financially reduce your %.

- In the last 18 months some people have been doing it really tough because of Covid. If that's the case then reduce your tithe. Look at 2 Cor 8:12. READ.
- On the other hand there are many people doing very well at the moment economically with all the government money that is around. If that's your situation then you should be looking to increase percentage you give.

But whatever your level of income I encourage you to use % giving. That is the the real test of generosity not the colour of the note you put in the plate!

Giving should never be limited to a percentage, 10% or any other amount.

The love of God towards us knows no limits, so our love back to God through our giving should know no limits.

So Graduated Tithing, I commend it to you. Giving becomes an exciting adventure when you keep challenging yourself to take another step in Faith by increasing the percentage you give.

Next week Lynda will share in more detail how we do that in our lives.

Now I just want to explain the **commitment card** we're asking you to use.

1. Make a pledge - Use chart to help you.
2. Explain Chart
3. Many options for how you give that pledge but please consider PLEDGE GIVING as that really helps our Treasurer with cash flow.
4. Two sections. You can return the first part as an act of worship on Commitment Sunday.
5. The second part you can keep as a record for yourself and a reminder of your commitment.
6. Commitment Sunday is 20<sup>th</sup> June or you can put it in the plate one Sunday soon after that.

When we were in Israel 7 years ago we visited both the Dead Sea and the Lake of Galilee. The two lakes are remarkably different.

The Dead Sea has the Jordan river running into it but no river running out of it. It is full of salt and it is not called the Dead Sea for no reason at all.

The Lake of Galilee however has water flowing in and out and it is a beautiful lake for sailing on as we did, but also for swimming and for fishing. It is a lake full of life.

As Christians I think our lives should be like the Lake of Galilee. God generously gives us all things in Christ, He pours the Holy Spirit into our lives and brings us all the blessings of the Gospel of Christ. We are meant to take those blessings to others. We are the conduit through which the grace, love and generosity of God flow.

If our faith is only in our heads like the people in 8th century Israel, then we will be like the Dead Sea. Our faith will be useless and God won't be pleased.

If our faith flows down into our hearts and out into our lives like the Corinthians in their response to the Jerusalem appeal, then we will be more like the Lake of Galilee.

My friends, has God been generous to you in Christ, let that generosity flow through you in generosity to others, to God's glory.