

Trinity 5 Pr8B      St Stephen's 9.30 & 11      2 Cor 8: 7-15  
1.7.18

“The one who had much did not have too much; and the one who had little did not have too little.” (v15)

Elisabeth and I went to see out financial adviser at the bank a week or so ago. It so happened that the adviser was being appraised. We were asked if we minded his colleague being present.

This put me in mind of the move to appraise the clergy in the Diocese of Winchester many years ago. This was to be on two levels. There would be a colleague who would come and discuss ones ministry; then every two years, there would be a meeting with the bishop.

The way the scheme was set up, like all these systems, was good in theory, but the instructions on how to conduct such interviews left a lot to be desired. I think that my reaction was not dissimilar from that of many of the clergy, who saw the meeting with a colleague as a chance to share experiences in an informal way, each seeking to learn from the other. What we weren't happy about was the sending of a report to the Diocesan Bureaucrats after a meeting. Similarly, the meeting with the bishop was a chance to share something of the joys, frustrations and difficulties of ministry, rather than a judgement on one's work.

You may reply that I wanted my cake and eat it, but I don't think so. The work of the parochial clergy differs from parish to parish and in each individual. There are enough pressures on the clergy without giving them a sense of inadequacy, judged against some level of competence thought up by the centre.

What I'm saying is that one achieves more by encouraging people than by bullying them. And that is precisely what St Paul is doing in this morning's Epistle. He

writes to the Corinthian Church, encouraging them to give generously to the collection he is making for the poor Christians living in Jerusalem.

He suggests a number of reasons why they should contribute:

1. They have received so much spiritually, and a healthy life is so much more than grasping what we can, or failing to look beyond our immediate circle. It should involve giving, a principle many have forgotten. Remember Jesus said: "Give, and gifts will be given you. Good measure, pressed and shaken down and running over, will be poured into you lap; for whatever measure you deal out to others will be dealt to you in turn." (Lk 6: 38)

You may remember the words of Rudyard Kipling to students at McGill University in Montreal at a graduation ceremony: He said that if a person's scale of values was based solely on material wealth, that person would have difficulty all their life. "Do not pay too much attention to fame, power and money," he said. "Some day you will meet a person who cares for none of these, and then you will know how poor you are." Or as Churchill said: "You make a living by what you get; but you make a life by what you give."

2. We are encouraged by what others are doing and achieving to build up the life of the Christian Community.

3. We give as a response to the generosity of Christ on the Cross - "For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he become poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich." (v9)

Paul then goes on to suggest how we should give.

1. We should turn good intentions into generous deeds. I am only too aware how often my desire to give to a particular charity in response to an appeal either gets forgotten in the rush of life, or I simply leave it too long and

other things take its place. This applies also to giving of time and support to others.

2. We need to remember that we are not expected to give beyond our means – we can't give what we haven't got. On the other hand we need to give in relation to our resources. Remember the story of the Widow's Mite in the gospel? Sadly, too many are like the rich man rather than the widow. John Wesley preached about giving. His first point was: 'Make all you can.' A farmer in the congregation turned to his neighbor and nodded his approval. His next point was: 'Save all you can.' Again the farmer nodded. His last point was: 'Give all you can.' The farmer turned to his neighbor and said: "Now he's spoiled it!"

3. It is right to help those who have less than we have; and if the boot was on the other foot, to receive without embarrassment.

This last point has much to say about the imbalance between rich and poor nations, between the wealthy Northern Europe and the poor South, as well as the poor within our own community. There is no blueprint here about how the needs of others may be met, but here is a basis for making a judgement. And the Church of England has certainly put this into practice through the Church Urban Fund, which has made donations amounting to many million, all donated, to help the poor in the British Isles.

We should remember that:

Money can buy a house, but not a home; it can buy insurance, but not security; entertainment, but not happiness; medicine, but not health. Money can buy a bed, but not sleep; companionship, but not friendship; sex, but not love.

Perhaps the example of the late John Laing is worth pondering. In his 30's, his business was in difficulties and he decided to take stock of his life. He decided that the centre and purpose of his life should be Jesus Christ. He then decided that he would enjoy life, and help others to do so as well. With

these two aims he drew up a financial plan: if income was £2,000 per year, he would give £200, live on £500, and save £1,300. If income was £4,000 a year, live on £500, give £1,500 and save £2,000. You may remember that he was head of the large construction company of Laings. When Sir John Laing died, his estate was worth £371! He'd given the rest away.

A bishop was preaching on the evils of materialism. "You must never think you are in this world solely for the purpose of making money," he thundered. The papers picked up his address, and in reporting it, a sub-editor got the punctuation wrong. The poor bishop was reported to have said: "You must never think. You are in this world solely for the purpose of making money."

A strong man in a travelling fair used to take an orange and squeeze it dry, then challenged anyone to get a drop out of for a £5 prize. A number of strong young men tried, but failed. Then a weedy looking elderly man had a go, and squeezed two drops out of it. The strong man was amazed, and handed over the £5. "You're the first person to be able to do that," he said. "How did you do it?" "It wasn't difficult," replied the man. "I'm a church treasurer, and regularly have to get blood out of a stone!"

And a last thought. At the funeral of a wealthy man, one mourner asked another: "How much did he leave?" "Everything!" was the reply.

SO

Do your givin'  
 While you're livin'  
 Then you're knowin'  
 Where it's goin'

