

<u>Date :</u>	15 April 2018
<u>Series :</u>	Give it Away
<u>Preacher :</u>	Revd Anders Litzell
<u>Readings :</u>	Acts 3:1-20 Psalm 4 Luke 24:36b-49

I love the pairing of the readings that we have before us today; the way that promise and fulfilment are held together.

First we read Jesus say: I am going to send you what my Father has promised, so wait until you are clothed with power from on high! Next we see Peter and John offer ministry just while they were on the road – meeting the beggar's needs with God's resources.

Now we can see what Jesus meant. We have no silver or gold, Peter says – but what we have we give to you: the fullness of everything Jesus died for on the Cross.

Everything that Jesus took to the Cross, He has healed: our bodies, our souls, our spirits: the poverty of our nature, the curse that causes the earth to withhold its fruit from us: and every lack He has filled with His plenty.

I don't suppose the beggar did mind much that they had no money – because what they did give to him, money could not buy anyway.

You have heard me say over and over that we already have what we need to be faithful in our mission at this time, because being faithful means, by definition, to steward what we DO have, not what we don't.

This is where faithful stewardship begins, with the greatest treasure in our possession.

Our stewardship of the Gospel, of the Good News of Jesus Christ! Our faithfulness with living our lives in such a way that this Gospel is visible in our thoughts, words and deeds.

I don't know if you know a man called John Wimber; he was one of the pioneers of the Charismatic renewal of the 60s and 70s – he was an American, be don't let's hold that against him. What he used to say – and I embrace this fully, because it is a deeply true principle in the life of Faith, was: if you want to keep something that God has given you, you have to give it away.

You have to! It is one of the follies of the Christian faith – because as far as the world is concerned, the way to keep something, is to hold on to it, lock it up in a safe and take out an insurance policy against its loss.

But the Kingdom of Heaven operates on a different principle. I suppose the Kingdom of Heaven is more like a water tap than something you can lock in a safe. When we run a water tap, most of the water doesn't actually get used by us, because we only manage to drink so much of what comes past us, and the rest goes on to some unknown destination. Maybe a waterfall is a better description, because whatever doesn't get used for our benefit goes on to water the land downstream.

So there's no point in taking a bucket of water and locking it in a safe – the moment the water is no longer moving, it has lost its life and will soon be stagnant and unusable.

That is the way of the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church; there is a superabundance of God's gifts among us, but we have to be willing to let the vast majority of God's gifts slip through our hands, pass via us to benefit others, because we simply cannot keep it for ourselves – there is no way to. And the only way to make sure that God's blessings don't go past us to others, is to stop the flow of water. And sometimes we do, sadly, but more often we don't realise that God adjusts the flow of His blessings to our willingness to distribute.

Every aspect of our lives now follow this principle. Our prayers: it is absolutely right to pray for ourselves, for our needs and for God's presence in our lives – and it is necessary to, because if we don't it's a form of spiritual pride that says "I'll pray for others, but I'm alright myself" – but the balance is that praying for others is like opening the tap – and there is more for us as well.

Acts of kindness and of service follow the same pattern – it is right to receive help when we need it, and necessary, but in the flow of generosity our own willingness to have God's gifts pass through our hands to others is integral.

It is the same way with money; whatever passes through our hands passes through our hands for our blessing and for others' blessings. The main difference is that it is actually possible to stockpile money; because it keeps rather well. Our challenge is to actively give. And God has built generosity into the Kingdom of God, to the point where the default model is to give away a tenth of what comes into our hands.

By the way, have you ever wondered about that – why a tenth? Did you know that the way the ancient Hebrews spoke and thought, the number 'ten' represented "the totality". So if you said in a story, there were ten young ladies – you are implying that you're talking about all the young ladies there are. In the same way, if you give away one tenth to God's work, you are saying with that tenth "God, all the money I have, is yours".

And this is the pattern of generosity; when we receive, we give. By giving we acknowledge that the Giver, God, has more than enough to replenish what we give away.

And it happens!

Jesus says that we will receive hundredfold more than what we give – again this is symbolic speak, because a hundred is ten tens; so we receive not just ten times in return; a fullness in return, we receive ten tens – we receive a fullness of fullnesses again for everything that we give away. Now and in the world to come.

Because God multiplies. The first blessing is : be fruitful and multiply. We live on a generous earth, and God has, in Christ, restored us to fellowship and friendship with the earth. Have you ever thought about how radical a concept it is that if you plant a seed of grain it grows up to return a multiple amount; just from the generosity of the soil?

This is the generosity of our God.

And this goes in every area of our lives – last week you heard Barbara share a testimony from one lady who had come to our Healing Rooms before Christmas with Stage 4 cancer both here and there – and now she wrote back to say it's all disappeared: not even a trace of the cancer left!

When this lady wrote to share with us, it released more: on Wednesday in our mid-week service we had three more healings: one foot, one hip and one arm – these weren't complete healings, maybe 80% ones; they got significantly better but there was some little niggle remaining – but I'll take it: it is how we steward what we receive: we give it away. Whether a material good that we give to someone else, or a spiritual good that we pass on to someone else: in our testimony lies the seed to what God will do next to multiply his goodness. The testimony is the seed we plant just as much as when we give money to the work of God.

So in the weeks to come, I will give you several occasions to consider God's generosity, and our generosity in response.

Let us pray.