

# Reflecting God's Generosity

Sermon by the Rev Derek Lightbourne, September 29<sup>th</sup> 2019 St James and All Saints

Keynote Bible passages: 1 Timothy 6.6 – 19, Luke 16.19 -31

Collect: Good and gracious God, all that we have comes from you; make us sensitive in all our dealings with each other and with your whole creation. Grant that we may reflect your generosity in our lives and do your will on earth, as Jesus has called us to do, in the power of your Holy Spirit.

This morning I invite our focus especially on the Collect of the Day. This Sunday brings to a close September being Stewardship month. While there has been emphasis on the giving of money towards the work of the church, and of involvement of time and talents offered, stewardship in Christian context is that, and more. The Sermon is entitled '*Reflecting God's generosity*'. The two scripture passages we've just heard explore more of this theme.

- 1) The collect might be described as providing a '*wholistic*' dimension. It lends itself to consideration of four aspects reflecting the theme of the sermon '*Reflecting God's generosity*.' First then, '*Good and gracious God, all that we have comes from you*.' There is the address to God, 'good and gracious', describing aspects of God's nature. Good we would know, gracious suggests kind, loving, sensitive to peoples' needs, willing to hear our prayer petitions. Also the Hebrews of the Old Testament time were very aware of Jehovah Jireh, God who provides. There's an echo of this in the letter to Timothy praying that we 'set our hearts on God ....who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.'

The testimony becomes a prayer at the offertory in the service: 'To you Lord belongs the greatness, the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty and we respond: All that is in the heavens and the earth is yours and of your own we give you'. It is this that's at the heart of our being generous, whether of possessions, or time and in our hearts one's focus on love of God.

- 2) The second phrase prays that God will: '*make us sensitive in all our dealings with each other*.' That's an important request and its likely we don't get it right all the time. The New Testament has numbers of lists of qualities for living in relationship with one another, in family, in the church, and of who we are. The first reading this morning has one such list as Paul addresses Timothy: 'Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.' Let's work on those qualities, to which we might add being sensitive. I'm mindful of how difficult it can be to 'say sorry', or 'please forgive me...' Yet how releasing it is and how much building of relationship can occur when we say those 'bridge words' over the chasm of tensions and hurts and misunderstandings. This we exercise in family, and church, and we pray for it in our nation and internationally. 'Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.'

- 3) Now the third petition of the collect: God...*make us sensitive in all our dealings.....with your whole creation*. It seems to me we've taken a long time

to get to this, and at last taking some responsibility to put things to right. 200 plus years of pouring burned fossil fuels into polluting the atmosphere being but one example. Last sermon I offered several examples of what we have taken for granted but realise now needs attention – chemical runoffs into our lakes and waterways from fertilisers, filling in swamps, now more descriptively named ‘wetlands’ - breeding grounds for small plants and aquatic creatures. And engaging in big game hunting – even the description jars. What of the fortunes of elephants for their ivory, tigers for their pelts, male lions for their heads and other forest animals as ‘bush meat’?

The call to arrest climate change is being taken up by young people realising their world and ours is threatened. I recently read a book review in *New Scientist* headed ‘Saving earth by changing us.’ This suggests that we - all have responsibility to work towards this. We have to change. It was St Paul who prophesied ‘Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.....to be set free from its bondage to decay’. Whilst I don’t like the rise in petrol prices, it may be there’s a plus – that we are more careful in whether or not we need to use our vehicle.

I just despair at the number of items in the supermarket using one-off plastic in wrappings and containers. It’s a matter of trying yet it’s really hard to avoid. I try to buy items that don’t need plastic wrapping – and feel guilty when I don’t. Or at least use plastic containers that can be re-used. Furthermore, there’s the realisation now the danger of plastics broken up into small micro-plastics entering the food chain. This is bad for humans and other living creatures. In this regard we can all help to lessen pollution of this fragile planet. I’m just waiting for opportunity to preach a sermon entitled ‘There is no Planet B.’

Please God, make us sensitive to our dealings with your whole creation.

4) Fourthly, a concluding phrase rounds off the collect (which is what collects do, summing up the prayers of God’s people) ‘*God...grant that we may reflect your generosity in our lives and do your will on earth, as Jesus called us to do,.....*’ I note here the imagery of ‘reflecting’ - what we do and how as aspects of God’s nature. That’s a powerful petition inviting our response.

Time doesn’t allow to unpack the parable of this morning’s gospel of a rich man and a poor man and their fortune or misfortune in the life to come. In the context of stewardship, it links the teaching of last Sunday, ‘You cannot serve God and wealth.’ Thus, it links with the petition of the collect: ‘*may we reflect God’s generosity.*’ We serve God and on earth do what Jesus called us to do, in the power of the Holy Spirit.’

Let us respond to the message of the sermon as we pray again the Collect of the Day: Good and gracious God, all that we have comes from you; make us sensitive in all our dealings with each other and with your whole creation. Grant that we may reflect your generosity and do your will on earth, as Jesus has called us to do, in the power of your Holy Spirit.