

Promises, Promises (#4)

- Do you promise to give a fitting proportion of your time, talents and money for the Church's work in the world?

Cartoon

- Show cartoons:
 - both the Derek the Cleric one
(/home/cmb/Images/Cartoons/DerekTheCleric/derek002.gif)
 - and the baptism one - explain adult baptism & associations, read the text...
(/home/cmb/Images/Cartoons/Christian/AllGods.gif)
- That this is sometimes how some people regard their money - theirs, and theirs alone - how dare minister or anyone else tell them how they should dispose of their income...? teach what the Bible says?!
 - need for sensitive and careful handling...
 - but there is a pressing need for us to hear what God has to say to us too!

Ananias and Sapphira

- Go back to the story Liz read for us earlier.
- Fairly well known - but pretty gruesome!

Context & Story:

- joy of Christ, new brothers and sisters in Christ, overwhelmed with joy, living and giving more like a family; selling off possessions to support one another; expecting imminent return of Christ so living off capital to an extent;
- in particular Barnabas has sold a field and laid the money at the apostles feet, giving up all control on how it be used except that it was given to the work of Christ's Kingdom.
- the very fact that it was recorded suggests this was viewed positively by the believers - Barnabas would have gained some amount of celebrity or kudos - **however unwittingly or unwanted** - through his generosity;
- **Ananias and Sapphira watching...** wanting that status, wanting to be in the centre of things; envious...
- **tried to repeat the trick, but selfishly rather than selflessly.**

What did they do wrong?

- They forgot the seriousness of the promise they'd made when they called Jesus their **LORD** and Saviour!
 - they were looking out for themselves.
- Contrast with other believers is marked:
 - generosity, spontaneity, lack of claim on what was theirs, sharing;
 - calculating, planned, holding some back for themselves, lies

Do You Promise To Give?

- OK, so what exactly does this story have to do with us?
- Remember our context: **promises made at profession of faith:**
 - *"Do you promise to give a fitting proportion of your time, talents and money for the Church's work in the world?"*

Everything for us...

- First point is context - declaration of faith
 - faith rooted in fact that God did not spare his own son for us
 - we are bought at a price - an incredible price!
- There's a simple song from Junior Praise that captures this:
 - He paid a debt He did not owe,*
 - I owed a debt I could not pay.*
 - I needed someone to wash my sins away,*
 - And now I sing a brand new song,*

*Amazing grace the whole day long,
For Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay.*

...a fitting proportion...

- God wants to have first call on all we are and have...
...but remember also that he made us, and knows what we **need**.
 - so he doesn't demand of us more than we can afford!
 - when someone preaches on money they can get a hard time from folk who, rightly, don't want the result to be folk who can ill afford to give any more feeling guilty, or giving more than is wise;
- In early church they were gearing up for Christ's imminent return, so to an extent lived off their capital not their income.
- Over time realised that Jesus wasn't going to come back before they had exhausted their capital!
- So they returned to the OT principles suited to a stable community:
 - tithing;
 - giving a **proportion** of income on a **regular** basis to God;
 - *On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. (1 Cor 16:2)*
 - tithe literally means 10%, a tenth;
 - there have been arguments about whether that is an abiding figure, or just passing;
 - *(those who argue that it was specific to the OT period point to (i) it supported the priests, who function as a civil service for the nation of Israel as well as their specifically religious functions (judges, support of the destitute), which today we pay through the taxation system; (ii) there is no specific mention of a tithe or tenth in relation to Christian giving in the new testament)*
 - *from that they conclude that a fitting proportion might be 5%, or some other figure*
 - while I can understand the logic, I'm not convinced!
 - certainly 10% is a good aim point, if you can afford it;
 - (remembering that all our giving comes into this - our regular offerings to church, support of missionaries, donations to Tearfund and other relief organisations, support of the likes of Scripture Union for their work amongst children...!)
 - in OT tithe was a legal requirement, and **generosity was encouraged on top - which reflects something of the thinking behind having a Gift Day each year, an "on top" opportunity to say thanks to God**

Different methods

- There are different ways we can give - all equally valid, different trade-offs
 - regularly in the plate - advantage of being **tactile** - I learned to give by seeing my parents give week by week...
 - regularly through direct debit or similar - convenient, following through on the promise (I **will** give...), not showing off
 - one-off, as situation allows - some people have a regular income, a salary or a pension; others get their money more sporadically!

...of your time, talents and money...

- Sometimes we get too hung up on money - and sometimes we go the other way and talk about all sorts of other things, except money!
- The reality is that **we should be giving all of who we are** - and while that includes money, it is by no means the only thing!!
- We all have more than money:
 - Time: to give to things, to work, to help... **dishes, hoovering, cleaning, setting out chairs**
 - Talents: particular gifts that others can't bring... **music, teaching, organising, administration, evangelism**

...for the Church's work in the world?

- When thinking about what and how we can give, can be helpful to think a bit about what we are trying to achieve!!
- Congregations I've been in the past have had a purpose statement, which sums up the kinds of things they are about:
- *DMPC: Our aim is to become increasingly a congregation among whom Jesus Christ is personally known, effectively served and powerfully praised in contemporary society.*
- *DSA: It is our AIM, by the grace of God, TO GROW: STRONGER through WORSHIP, WARMER through FELLOWSHIP, DEEPER through DISCIPLESHIP, BROADER through SERVICE, LARGER through EVANGELISM, and so, TOGETHER, to HONOUR CHRIST.*
- So, in thinking about how you contribute your time or your talent, can consider those purposes:
 - worship (music, reading, admin), fellowship (tea, visiting), discipleship (prayer, bible study, creche!), evangelism (Start! course, Holiday Club, SU camps...), service (loads of stuff in the community)
- Likewise, when the Congregational Board sits down to decide how to spend the money, our priority should always be **the Church's work in the world**
 - not just keeping Fintry Church going, wind and watertight, warm on a Sunday morning
 - **(even if those are good things to do!)**
 - they are good only in so far as they reflect God's work in the world - a place where people can be for worship
- For information, we are only just covering our costs:
 - turnover is something like £42/43,000 per year, in total
 - for the Congregational Board not to be in the position of scrabbling around, worrying about making ends meet, and so able to concentrate on development, David Clark when he was Interim Moderator reckoned £50,000 per year would be a healthy target
- We do not seek to keep an institution alive:
 - **we seek to give of ourselves to support and advance the Kingdom of Jesus Christ!**

Conclusion

- Lets give, not have squeezed out of us by guilt:
 - but view the promises we've made as a prod, a reminder - just as anniversaries are reminders of the love that is shared in a marriage!!
- For a couple deeply in love, committed to one another, anniversaries are not occasions of guilt, of frantic present buying to keep their partner happy
 - rather, the reminder of promises made in the past, of commitments made, brings joy and gladness, a fresh desire to express and show the love that is shared, brings remembrance of all that the partner means to us and has done over the years
- *(Malachi 3:10) Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.*