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Athelstone Uniting Church #73

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Text: *Genesis 1:1-2:3, Acts 2: 42- 47; Acts 4: 32 -37 NIV*

Part 1

Let's pray

Loving God of all creation,
Your goodness is showered upon us every moment of every day
Your unfailing generosity is utterly reliable, completely trustworthy
We owe everything to you
Even when we let you down and disappoint you
Your renewing love comes to us in Jesus Christ
To make us and the whole creation new
Thank you generous God
Help us to be grateful people
Not only in words,
But also in the way we live.
May our actions towards other demonstrate our love for you
And our appreciation for all you do for us.
Amen¹.

Intro

Throughout this month our theme is "Generous!"

This is a time to celebrate how extravagantly generous our God is and to 'count our blessings'!

We have so much to be thankful for.

God created every good thing we enjoy:

Our bodies and our abilities
our human relationships
The environment in which we live
And those things we consider our possessions.²

¹ From Robert and Ainslie Bos: *Generosity*

² The UCA SA Children's and Family Ministry Team: *What's Mine Is Yours*

The first creation story in Genesis describes the wonderful world we have been given – to make our home, to share, to enjoy, and to care of.

In Desmond Tutu’s wonderful re-telling of the creation story, he says:

In the very beginning, God’s love bubbled over when there was nothing else – no trees, no birds, no animals, no sky, no sea – only darkness. Out of this love, God spoke. “Let there be light”.

And there was day and there was night

And when the first day was done, God smiled and knew that it was good.

Skipping to the end,

God looked at everything that he had made and clapped his hands together in delight.

“Isn’t it wonderful!:

And on the seventh day, God laughed, and rested, and enjoyed his glorious creation.”³

I’m sure if I was to ask you about what things in God’s glorious creation take your breath away, or remind you of God’s wonderful creativity, I would get many many different replies.

Many of you know that I love birds.



Talk about Rainbow lorikeets in the garden

God doesn’t just give birds. He gives *spectacular* birds. Resplendent in their colour

And we could say the same about countless things we experience in nature.

³ Desmond Tutu: Let There Be Light



Stephen Webb says that 'God's being is in giving, giving is who God is'.⁴

In his book, *Holy Habits*, Andrew Roberts says: "Giving is a key part of the nature of God. It is possible to read the bible as a narrative or a story of giving.

In Genesis we see God gifting creation to humanity to take care of and to enjoy.

It is not long before selfishness (sin) damages both the gift and the relationships that were designed to let life flourish. But this did not stop God from giving.

Resources continue to be given both through the ordinary and the miraculous. Wisdom, teaching and prophecy are given to guide and facilitate holy living. And then (from John's gospel):

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Even when this gift is rejected God keeps on giving. Giving new life to Jesus who had been crucified by the selfishness of sin. And then giving the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost that birthed the community that in turn was noted for its giving.

So in this season of generosity - our starting point is thinking about the generous, extravagant, persistent giving of God."⁵

let's sing, and I'll be back a little later!

Sing: how great thou art

Glen: finance presentation

Jayne: readings

Part 2



⁴ Quoted in Robert and Ainslie Bos: *Generosity*

⁵ Andrew Roberts: *Holy Habits* p166

When we experience the generous, extravagant love and grace of God, a natural response is to pass on that generosity to others.

Churches are often places where people are found to be generous with their gifts and their time.⁶

In the 2 readings from Acts, Luke presents pictures of the early Christian communities of disciples supporting one another and those in need in the wider community by the generous sharing of their resources. They shared and sold possessions to create a common fund which could be used to support those in need of income or resources. The fund may also have supported the apostles and later on the deacons and others set apart for ministries of preaching and service.

It is likely that over time this season of extravagant spontaneity settled into sustainable systems of resourcing.⁷

Why do we give?

we give because we are blessed!

We give in response to the generosity of God. When we become aware of God's overwhelming generosity to us in countless ways, we become transformed by that experience and become God's generous people.

God acts in us and through us, so that we ourselves are caught up in God's unfailing, overwhelming generosity towards God's people and the whole creation.

(Bishop Robert Schnase) says that 'giving helps us to become what God wants us to be. Giving is not merely about the church's need for money, but about the Christian's need to grow in generosity. Generosity is a fruit of the spirit, a sign of our spiritual growth. God uses our giving to change the world for god's purposes, and God uses our giving to reconfigure our interior lives and to change us!

I want to share an image with you:



⁶ Holy Habits: *Gladness and Generosity* p 40

⁷ Andrew Roberts: *Holy Habits* p165

I saw this while on a day off last week which I spent in McLaren Vale with Paul and Jools and a few others.

It struck me that my perception has been that this church has seen itself in a position of scarcity for some time. We've talked in the past about the struggles of meeting the budget and looked at the work that needs to be done on our building and so on.

Yet as I reflected on that bare vine I realised that this is of course just a temporary state. The vine is pruned and soon buds appear and in time, a harvest is ready to be picked.



Friends, I want to say that we are in a different season now. We are no longer in a season of scarcity. God is blessing us with fruit.

As you have heard, this is a generous church

- Frontier services
- Food to uniting communities
- Lent and easter giving

I think we are moving into a new season – a time where we are called to bless others with this fruit. Even more abundantly and generously than before.

So let's look at generous giving:

Giving is expressed in many ways.

Financial – it can involve the selling or sharing of goods and possessions which was such a hallmark of the first Christian communities described by Luke in Acts.

I've mentioned your track record of generous giving

As a Church community we are discerning how we develop our giving further: as we listen to the needs of our local community – how can we be more generous for example, when it comes to addressing hunger or loneliness?

If you see Athelstone as your spiritual home, if you are excited about what God is up to and trust the leaders of your church, then we invite you to consider giving – or to review your giving – whichever applies to your circumstances – regularly and generously

There is a growing energy around activities like Threads, Triple Cs, ToFs, Stay and Play, Spirited Sundays, Messy Church and the list goes on..

Why ask you to consider your giving?

To add fuel to the fire. To join in with the work of the Spirit

To partner with and to invest in what God is doing

Let me remind you though of what Paul said to the churches I Corinth as he called on them to give for the Christians in Jerusalem:

“Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

So this is very much about giving what you feel called to give and what you are able to give. Cheerfully!

Giving is expressed in other ways too:

Giving is expressed through **time**:

Some of us may not have much in the way of money to give, but they may have time. Jesus spent time with children, and those who were overlooked or ostracised, and those who needed a gentle touch to bring healing and wholeness

Many of you volunteer in the community and here in church. I encourage you to think about that time as a gift that you give ad part of your response to God’s gift to you.



Giving is also expressed through gifts of **love**. Gifts that Jesus gave and was glad to receive.

Sometimes simple gifts like: a cup of water to quench his thirst

Sometimes extravagant gifts like : a pint of pure nard poured over his head.

What gifts of love do you give?

Every day we get emails, phone calls, texts, and social media ads offering to review our insurance or power bills. But when did we last review our giving in its different forms?

What if you were to have a Generosity Audit?

.. And ask yourself how you use what God has given you?

I invite you this week to create some time and space to prayerfully review your giving of money, time, love and anything else the Spirit might bring to your attention.

You could do a Generosity Audit as an individual, as a family, or as part of a group you belong to.

At different stages in our lives, the balance of giving and receiving may change. Giving should not be a burden, but a means of blessing for both giver and receiver.

Take some time to sit down and pray about your finances. They are God's good gifts to you. How can you use them for God's glory? Are there people you could be generous towards with them?

Think about your regular giving to our church (how much you give, how you give, how often you give).

I also want to invite you to do some journaling – perhaps you already do this spiritual practice – regularly writing about your experiences, thoughts and encounters with God . during this month I invite you to write daily about the things you feel thankful for and once you've done that generosity audit, write down where God might be challenging you to be generous in your giving.

As Christian disciples we reflect God's love in our generosity to others

In coming weeks we'll reflect further on our giving, we'll look forward to what God is calling us to next and we'll celebrate – our generous, extravagant giving God!

Let me close with these words from John Wesley:

Do all the good you can

By all the means you can

In all the ways you can

In all the places you can

At all the times you can

To all the people you can

As long as ever you can.

Amen