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**Athelstone Uniting Church #74**

**11 August 2019**

**Text:** *Psalm 100, 1 Cor 1:4-9, Matt 10:5-11 NIV*



**Let's pray**

Thank you Generous God for the Word you have for us this morning.  
Open our hearts to hear what you have to say to us  
then nudge us to action in the power of your Spirit.  
Amen

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.

Last week I spoke about how Giving is a key part of the nature of God.

God, as an act of love and grace, created the world for us to take care of and enjoy, to flourish in,

But the self-centeredness of humankind damaged both the gift and the relationships that were designed to let life flourish.

But this didn't stop God from giving.

God provided guiding principles for living through the Law, and prophets, priest, and kings

But people continued to centre their lives on their own personal needs and so, out of love, God gave his one and only Son...

Even when this gift was rejected, when Jesus was hung on the cross, God kept on giving.

On the third day, he gave new life to Jesus.

And then at Pentecost the gift of the Spirit that birthed the new early church community - who in turn were known for their giving.

So in this season of generosity - our starting point is to celebrate our generous, extravagant, persistently giving God."<sup>1</sup>

Last week I also shared an image of a bare grape vine with you



It struck me when I saw this image a few weeks ago 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 challenges 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 again that we are in a different season now. We are no longer in a season of scarcity. God is blessing us with fruit.

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

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

we give because we are blessed!

(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 encouraged you in this last week to do a Generosity Audit and some journaling.

if you have started on this –Well done to you!

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from: Andrew Roberts: *Holy Habits* p166

we have already heard from one generous individual who has responded by offering their gifts and skills to help the church raise funds. Thank you!

For those of you who haven't started thinking and praying about this yet, I plan to send out some tools in the next few days to help you.

So that brings us to this week

I've said that when we experience the generous, extravagant love and grace of God, a natural response is to pass on that generosity to others.

Our *first* natural response has got to be **gladness** and **thanksgiving**!

## Gladness and thanksgiving

### Psalm 100

At the start of the service Di read Psalm 100 as our call to worship.

This Psalm is a great reminder of what God has done for us. That gracious generosity of God lifts our spirits with joy and prompts our *gladness*. That *gladness* is then expressed through *thanksgiving* in our worship and praise.

### 1 cor 1:4-9

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians we see *thanksgiving* as an expression of gratitude, and *gratitude* as a response to grace – the love of God freely and generously given in Christ.

Paul is *thankful* for both what Christ has done for him but also for the grace he can see has been given to others – in the way they speak of Christ, in the gifts of the Spirit that they are developing. He is *thankful* for the way God's love is working in in them.

### Matt 10:5-11

Psalm 100 shows how we respond with *gladness* and *thanksgiving* in our *worship and praise*

Matthew 10 shows how we respond with *gladness* and *thanksgiving* in our *service*.

Freely you have received; freely give.

The generous love that the disciples have freely received from God prompts them to share it generously with others around them - through preaching and engaging with people practically, by seeking to release them from whatever prevents them living to their full potential.

It is also interesting to note that as the disciples freely receive the love of God, they are prompted not just to give gladly and generously to others, but also to *receive* gladly and generously from others. They are to let others give them resources and shelter.

In other words they are to be generous in letting others be generous to them! <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Holy Habits: Gladness and Generosity

"The Christian church was born in *gladness*. Gladness for what God had done through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. There was gladness in the home, gladness in the temple and gladness out in the streets."<sup>3</sup>

Gladness for *us* can be expressed in many ways. On the adventure of discipleship there are moments when gladness is ecstatic – a mountaintop experience where we marvel at the goodness of God in creation or singing with 1000s of other Christians in your own language or being on a camp or retreat where you feel so close to God and to others.

There are other times when gladness is experienced in the satisfaction of getting a job done, getting past an obstacle, using your gifts and skills to serve others, or simply delighting in the world around you.<sup>4</sup>

### **Not always glad – what happens then?**

We can't be glad and joyful everyday. Life does have its challenges – health, accidents, incidents, and so on.

Sometimes – many times – gladness comes through our church family and friends – shining a light into our dark places just when we need it most, sometimes with a smile, or a phone call, or a meal, or simply asking 'How are you?' And really listening when we reply.

### **Ps 23**

Psalm 23 is a wonderful psalm for expressing this

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.  
<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,  
<sup>3</sup> he refreshes my soul.  
He guides me along the right paths  
for his name's sake.  
<sup>4</sup> Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.  
  
<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
<sup>6</sup> Surely your goodness and love will follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord  
forever.

Our Lord, our shepherd, walks beside us in the darkest valleys of life

The Lord's presence gives us courage to continue on

The Lord blesses us with good things and our cup overflows

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Roberts in *Holy Habits*

<sup>4</sup> Holy Habits, Gladness and Generosity p201

The Lord's presence is with us all the days of our life

Hold on to these words with gladness.

In a time when many are anxious, gladness is a gift of the Spirit that can be transformational. Wearing our gladness so that others can see and feel our joy, can change the atmosphere. Let's *share* our joy for life and *enjoy* this life that God has gifted us!

### What is God calling us to next?

So in what ways is God calling us share our generosity, thanksgiving and gladness with others?

What is God calling us to next?

### UCA vision for a just Australia

The Uniting Church has a beautiful vision for our nation:

We see a nation where each person and all creation can flourish and enjoy abundant life.

The Uniting Church in Australia believes the whole world is God's good creation.

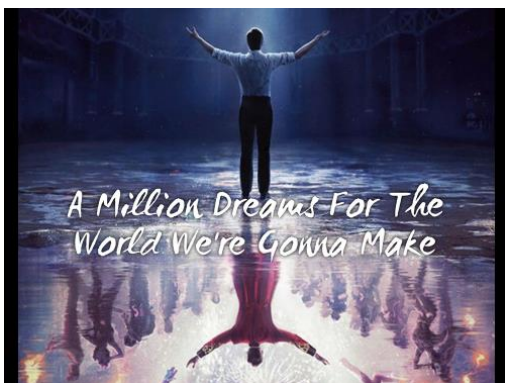
Each person is made in God's image and is deeply loved by God. In Jesus, God is completing the reconciliation and renewal of the whole creation.

### How can we help others flourish?

So how can we join in with what God is up to - by helping this vision become a reality here in our local community?

I want to encourage you to pray and dream about this..

### A million dreams



Ryan Wolfe, is a disability pastor in the US. He writes:

"In the movie The Greatest Showman the young P.T. Barnum dreams of a new world. A world that he imagines would be colorful and perfect. A world that is in bright contrast that he currently lives in.

In the song, A Million Dreams, PT Barnum sings:

*Every night I lie in bed  
The brightest colors fill my head  
A million dreams are keeping me awake  
I think of what the world could be  
A vision of the one I see  
A million dreams is all it's gonna take  
A million dreams for the world we're gonna make*

The young PT Barnum was a dreamer and true visionary. What is visionary? It is someone who sees the future as it could be or even as it should be.

the prophet Joel wrote:

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your old men will dream dreams,  
your young men will see visions.

Leaders who are compelled by vision are often thought to be crazy. People think they have lost their minds because the work tirelessly to achieve this preferred future reality that others cannot see or understand. It isn't until these million dreams of leaders become reality that others stop viewing them as crazy.

I imagine the difficulty that Jesus must have experienced while he lived and ministered on earth. He obviously saw the world as it could be and should be. People could not see what he saw. Even religious leaders did not catch the vision of Jesus. Jesus desired to make a reality for the world and the Church. Jesus desired a reality that was full of the brightest colors and variety that others were not open to our accepting of.

Jesus understood that those who appear to be weak are indispensable. He saw that the Church of his day was incomplete. He had a dream that all who were purposely excluded would one day be accepted, embraced, and loved as an equal. Jesus was thought to be crazy for commanding this. People could not see the preferred future that Jesus saw. Because he was viewed as such a radical he was eventually killed.

I believe that this dream of Jesus is still our calling today. He commanded religious leaders to make the Church complete by including ALL people."<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps what Ryan Wolfe is speaking about is bringing God's dream.. God's kingdom.. here on earth..

And we are called.. as Christians .. to be part of God's dream .. God's kingdom here on earth.

So as Christians, today, here in Athelstone, what do we dream of?

In Acts chapter 2, Peter quotes the Joel scripture on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit of God was poured out on all the people.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.abilityministry.com/2018/09/05/the-greatest-showman-a-million-dreams/>

And the chapter finishes with:

So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.<sup>6</sup>

They dreamed dreams AND they acted on that dream – with glad and generous hearts.

So how might you be part of bringing about these dreams in our time and place?

*Silence*

Lets pray:

Give us O God a vision for the world  
as your love would make it

A world where the weak are protected  
And none go hungry or poor

A world where refugees are  
welcomed warmly into new communities

A world where the benefits of civilised life  
are shared and everyone can enjoy them

A world where different races, nations and cultures  
live in understanding and mutual respect

A world where peace is built with justice  
and justice guided by love

A world where the beauty and integrity  
of creation is honoured and protected

And give us the inspiration and courage  
to share in the task of building it

Through Jesus the Christ  
Amen<sup>7</sup>

In a moment we are going to listen to the song that PT Barnum sings in The Greatest Showman.

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<sup>6</sup> Acts 2:41-47 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>7</sup> Source: Rev Leanne Jenski from closing communion for selection panel August 2019  
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As you listen, I invite you to be open to what God might be saying to you – there is a table with post-it notes and textas – I encourage you to write down your dreams and pop them on the window over there. You can do this during the song, or later after communion – or anytime as you feel led before you go today.

What dream has God put in your head and how might you be part of bringing it about?

Listen

Pray

Write it down (and add your name)

*Play: A Million Dreams*