

Reflection - Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
30-06-2024
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27 David's Lament over Saul and Jonathon
Psalm 130 Put your hope in the Lord, he forgives your sin
2 Corinthians 8: 7-15 Paul encourages generosity
Mark 5: 21-43 Jesus heals a bleeding woman and restores a girl to life

Introduction

This morning I'd like to look at the reading from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians and I'd like to focus on Paul's call to the Corinthians to be generous. Now he says he's not commanding them, so a better word to describe what he was calling for might be altruism.

Altruism refers to being helpful to other people with little or no interest in being rewarded.

First Christians

In fact, Altruism was probably what differentiated the first Christians from those around them who weren't.

It's clear that what made them Christians, was that they accepted that the death and resurrection of Jesus personally involved them. However, it wasn't from what they believed, but rather how they behaved that others saw and classified them as Jesus' followers. In fact, the first Christians weren't even called Christians. They were called followers of the way. It was how they lived lives of difference that made them stand out as Christians.

Just in that, I suppose there is a challenge to us as Christians today. How are we different to those around us who aren't Christians?

2 Corinthians - Generosity

Now let's look in detail at Paul's advice to the Corinthians.

In verses 7-8 we hear this:-

⁷ Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.⁸ I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others.

From this we can see that the Corinthians must have been pretty intent on living good Christian lives. Paul says that they excelled in Faith and in Speech and in Knowledge. If they excelled in faith they probably met together

regularly and prayed. Because they excelled in speech, they probably had good preachers. They excelled in knowledge, so they probably spent quite a bit of time studying the scriptures – much like we might in say a Bible Study today. He was imploring them though, to excel in the grace of Giving. But he was also making the point that he wasn't commanding them to do it.

He encouraged them to prove that their love was sincere. When you love someone, you would want to give your time and attention to provide for their needs. If you don't want to give of your time, or money, or attention, then there might be a question as to how sincere your love is.

Now let's look at verse 9 :-

⁹ For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

This verse really gets to the essence of the Gospel.

When Paul talks of Jesus being rich, yet becoming poor he isn't talking about money. From the evidence of Jesus as a carpenter, he was probably no better or worse off than you average first century Palestinian.

Jesus became poor, because he gave up his rights as God and became a human being. In his incarnation God voluntarily became a wholly human person. Jesus the man from Nazareth was subject to place, time and other human limitations. Jesus did not give up his eternal power when he became human, but he did generously set aside his glory and his rights and became poor in this way for us. It is through his life, his death, and his resurrection that he made us rich. Because it is through this that we receive both salvation and the gift of eternal life.

Paul points out to the Corinthians that Jesus was ultimately generous to us, and he challenges us to do likewise.

Let's now look at the next 3 verses, verses 10-12:-

¹⁰ And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something— ¹¹ now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. ¹² For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have.

Here Paul talks about willingness. Being the son of a Chinese storekeeper who struggled to part with anything, I must say I used to find it hard to willingly give, and sometimes I still do, but Paul is pretty clear that your willingness to give is more important than the actual amount.

Let's now look at the final 3 verses, 13-15:-

¹³ I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between ¹⁴ your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. ¹⁵ As it is written, 'The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.'

Here we see Paul isn't calling them to give more than they have, but rather from what God has blessed them with. Whilst we are called to be generous, we are also called to be responsible. We should give until it actually begins to hurt us, but not so that we neglect our responsibilities to our families or those who rely on us.

Paul is also advocating equality. Christians should care for each other. We should support others if we have the means to do so, because it might be later that they will support us.

The final line Paul quoted was from Exodus when God sent the manna and Quail in the desert. God was so generous in that situation, that there was enough to meet everyone's needs.

Conclusion

This morning we've looked at generosity or maybe a better word for what Paul was trying to get at - altruism.

I'd like you to take some time now, to think of a time you were generous to someone. How it might have felt good for you to be able to help someone else. Or maybe think of a time when someone else was generous to you. I recall in my first full time job as an engineer, there was no requirement to receive anything more than my agreed salary, but I was given a Christmas bonus which was in excess of a month's pay.

Today in our Gospel reading we heard how Jesus was generous and willing to help others. He helped both the woman who was bleeding and the girl who had died. In his life on this earth Jesus showed the ultimate in altruism, the ultimate in generosity. He died on the cross for you and for me.

We live in a world driven by a market economy. Supply is there to meet demand. Self interest – the opposite of altruism is the driving force. There doesn't appear to be much room for generosity.

As followers of Jesus, how does his generosity to us affect our generosity to others?

Is our generosity something people see in us that makes us different?