



Sermon: 23rd April 2017

What's it worth

Malachi 3: 6 - 12; John 20: 19-31

This morning as part of our service we have had our Stated Annual Meeting. Because of changes in charity law it is no longer necessary to have a congregational meeting in the way we used to. However, it is still important that you, the congregation, are informed of what is happening in the church, and specifically, at the Stated Annual Meeting, what happens to the money that you put in the plate every Sunday. Andy has outlined the specifics of our givings, where the money you put in a plate goes, and what it does, but I wanted to speak a wee bit about giving in general; why do we put money in the plate in the first place.

The first thing to say is that it is not a tax. Sometimes congregations can resent the amount of money that goes into the central offices of the Church as if it disappears into a black hole. In fact, the church does a huge amount of good with the money that goes into offering plates the length and breadth of the country every Sunday. Locally, we couldn't keep this building open if you didn't give week by week. And centrally, Crossreach alone runs an enormous operation which provides care for many of the most vulnerable people in our society. The "Go For It" fund helps congregations develop exciting community ventures. The Ministries Council, trains, deploys, supports ministers and other church workers throughout our nation and beyond. And just as I was saying to the children earlier, the central offices help to share out the resources so that wealthier congregations help poorer congregations. In fact, we are one of the congregations that get help from the central funds. What we put in to the centre doesn't cover what we get back from the centre. But your money, your offering, is a vital part of growing the kingdom of God here in Scotland!

The second thing to say is that it is not a collection! Putting money in the plate on a Sunday morning is not the same as putting money in a charity collection can. So why is that? When we join the church we take a promise to give a fitting proportion of our time, our talents, and our money to the work of the church. Although the church relies on our time talents and our money to survive, that is not why we give them. Giving to the church is not the same as a charity collection for two reasons. Firstly, we can't give to the church because we are the church. The church is the body of Christ – we are one big family and

our offering is our contribution to the work of that family. The second way giving to the church is different from giving to any other charity is that we give to the church as a way of giving to God, because God first gave to us. And that is true whether we are members or whether we are not members; God loved us first, God gave his son for us first, God reached out his hand to us first, and it is in response to that that we give ourselves; our time, our talents, and our money.

So what does that mean for our giving? It means we have to decide what it's worth! What is God worth to us? In the old Testament God asked his people for the first 10% of all their harvests. In the new Testament Jesus simply asked that people gave what they could. Some people gave their time – the disciples gave up everything to follow him. Some people gave their talents – Martha and Mary showed hospitality. Some people gave their money – the widow who put in her 2 pennies, which was all she had to give.

And still today Jesus asks us to give what we can, not what we can't. And this is the most important thing! Jesus wants us to give, of course he does, but he wants us to give with glad hearts, not grudgingly; with grateful hearts, not resentfully; with loving hearts, not guiltily. And so, it's important that we consider: what do we want to give, what does it mean to us, but also what are we able to give. Sometimes, we might find ourselves in a situation where we have been drawn in more and more and more to giving what we can't afford, whether that is time, or talents, or money. Sometimes we find ourselves in situations where we might be able to give more. Situations change. And so it's important that we review what we give; what do we want to give, what does it mean to us, what are we able to give.

There once was a management consultant who was invited in to a large firm to assess their processes and give them advice on how they could become a more efficient. He spent a few days with the firm, speaking to workers from various positions within the company, getting an idea of how things worked. At the end of the week he gave the CEO of the company his advice. "That's great", said the CEO, "how much do we owe you?" The consultant replied, "try this out for a year and then pay me what you think my advice was worth." The CEO was a bit taken aback but did as a management consultant said. A year later, he sent a cheque for \$250,000.

What's it worth? Sometimes we don't know advance what it's worth. When Jesus went to the cross, did he know what it was worth? The disciples were certainly confused. Thomas,

in some ways my favourite disciple, much maligned Thomas, discovered what it was worth.

Thomas has been called doubting Thomas. I think that's a bit unfair. He wasn't with the other disciples when the Lord appeared to them and if you think back you'll remember that the other disciples hadn't believed the women when they told them that the Lord had risen. So, Thomas actually is no worse than the other disciples and might actually be a little bit better! After all, the reason the other disciples were together is that they were in a locked room because they were afraid. If Thomas wasn't with them maybe he was the brave one! Poor Thomas, forever called the doubting, when actually they were all doubters. But then when Thomas encounters the risen Lord, suddenly all his need for proof disappears. He doesn't need to see the scars, nor to touch them, but in the presence of the risen Lord falls to his knees with that great declaration of faith and praise, "my Lord and my God!"

And indeed, for the rest of the disciples, they quickly discovered what it was worth. As we will discover over the coming weeks, the fearful disciples turned into the faithful disciples; the cowardly disciples turned into the convicted disciples; the wondering disciples turned into the witnessing disciples and the church was born. For them, the risen Lord's presence was worth their very lives.

We have journeyed with Jesus. We have entered into Jerusalem to the cheers of the crowds, "Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna". We have heard the cries of, "Hosanna!" turn to, "Crucify!" We have sat with him at the cross. We have heard his cry of pain and loss, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" We have heard his words of compassion in the midst of his pain, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." And we have heard that last triumphant cry, "It is finished!" We have mourned with the disciples, we have journeyed to the tomb on Easter morning, and there in the dawn we saw his footprint in the grass and his voice calling our name!

And this morning, the question to us is the same as it is every morning when we hear him call our name, what is it worth? And as we ask ourselves that challenging question let us determine to reflect anew and think again and review our giving of our time and our talents and money. To you, to me, to us, as we reflect on the events of Easter,

what is it worth?