

Editorial – To love Jesus is to love his bride

Paul Beasley-Murray

“Christ loved the church and gave his life for it” wrote the Apostle Paul. Indeed, Jesus loved the church so much that Paul went so far as to describe the church as the bride of Christ (Eph 6.22-33). Inevitably, therefore, if we love Jesus, we will love his bride, the church. What’s more, if we love Jesus, then we – like Jesus – will want to give of ourselves to his church.

To love is to give

One key consequence of our love for Jesus is that we will want to give money to his church. Indeed, giving to the church is expected of the people of God. To quote the Apostle Paul again, “Every Sunday each of you must put aside some money in proportion to what you have earned” (1 Cor 16.2). Paul doesn’t say precisely what that proportion might be – although in so far as he was a Jew, he may well have had in mind giving a tenth of our income to God. But the key point is that Paul had in mind giving to the church, who would in turn use it to help others.

To love deeply is to give extravagantly

Jesus himself appears never to have advocated ‘tithing’. He was far more radical: he advocated extravagant and sacrificial giving! For the fact is that, if we love deeply, we will want to give extravagantly. We see this, for instance, in the story of Mary who spent on Jesus the equivalent of a year’s wages (see John 12.1-8).

So let’s give extravagantly

Currently, most, if not all of us, are feeling the effects of the present era of austerity. However, I believe that if we all followed Paul’s instructions to the church at Corinth, then our church or parish treasurers would no longer have to worry about finance, for my perception is that, although we all love Jesus, we do not all love his church in equal measure.

Some love the church very much and over the years have been exceedingly generous, and at times sacrificial, in their giving. To such people we should wish to express our deepest appreciation. Without their support, churches would be in serious trouble, and would probably not be able to maintain their present

ministry. But there are others for whom the church is not a priority in their giving. It is not that they do not love the Lord. They do give to the church, but they also give generously to other causes too, perhaps not appreciating that, in many cases, a sizeable proportion of money given to the church is given away to others. Many churches give some of their income to support other good causes. They do this because they operate an 'all-in-giving' policy of Christian stewardship.

'All-in-giving' ('all-in-loving'?) explained

There was a time in our church when church members were bombarded by appeals to give - every month, if not every Sunday, there was a special collection for some good cause. This caused confusion, resulting in people splitting their giving between a variety of causes. Some years ago, we decided to do away with all appeals, except for three. Three times a year (at Harvest, Christmas, and on the occasion of the church anniversary) we would have a 'love offering' when we would encourage people to give over and above their normal giving. But, those three occasions apart, we agreed to do away with appeals. Instead, we said we would encourage people to give all their giving directly to the church, and then from the church's 'family purse' we would give to outside causes that had a particular call upon us as a church family.

One great advantage of the All-In-Giving approach is that it offers a reasoned approach to giving to others. My experience is that otherwise I am at the mercy of my emotions, as I am swayed first by one appeal to give, and then another. For me, All-In-Giving is a helpful way of giving.

Inevitably there will always be people who are committed to a charity not represented in the list of organisations we support, and they will understandably want to continue to support that charity. We understand that. However, we hope that most people will want to channel their Christian giving through the church.

Three principles underlying our giving

As a church we have three principles which guide us in our 'outside giving':

Principle 1: We have a duty to support the wider Baptist family. We therefore give generously to the Baptist Missionary Society, which supports some 350 mission workers in 35 countries. We also give generously to Baptist Home Mission, which enables small Baptist churches to have pastors, funds church planters, and resources the work of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

Principle 2: We have a duty to support Christian organisations in which our own members are or have been involved.

Principle 3: As a town-centre church we have a duty to support local charities in the town.

On the basis of these three principles, we always welcome ideas from members in terms of organisations we might support as also projects we might adopt for our love offerings.

There are various ways of giving

In a church like ours there are always people, who love the Lord Jesus but have yet to establish a system of giving.

Some may be recently baptised young people who are dependent on their parents for ‘pocket money’; or who have a small part-time job on a Saturday. Others may be students struggling financially in spite of student loans. However little we may have, if we truly love Jesus we will want to give something ‘in proportion to what we have’, to his church. If that means just putting 20p in an envelope, then let it be.

Others may be new to our church or new to the Christian faith and may still be uncertain as to how giving works in our church. The fact is that there are various ways. Some use the envelope scheme, while others prefer to give by standing order. Ultimately, the means is immaterial – what counts is the principle of regular giving.

We need to review our giving in the light of God’s love for us!

I am excited by what God is doing in our church, just as I am by what he is doing through our church. Through the mission of Central Baptist Church, as well as through the mission agencies we support, God’s love is being made known in our world. Through our giving we are partners of God’s mission to the world.

Our church is not a cult. We do not tell people what to give. All we can do is to ask people to review their giving to the church in the light of God's love – and then to give extravagantly!

Ambassadors of Reconciliation

Julian Reindorp

Formerly Rector of Richmond Parish Church, now retired. This is a transcript of Julian's address to this year's Ministry Today conference, as we gathered for prayer and worship in the retreat house chapel.

'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor 5.19)

We are called to be ambassadors of reconciliation

You may know the story of the three men who met in prison. They worshipped together each Sunday. The first man left prison and felt called to be a Methodist minister and in time was elected the President of the Methodist Conference of his country. The second man left and he felt called to be an Anglican priest and in 1994 he was elected Anglican Archbishop of his country. The third man stayed in prison nearly 27 years and, when he was released, he was in time elected president of his country. The prison, of course, was Robben Island, the country South Africa where I was born, and the man who celebrates his 92nd birthday this year is Nelson Mandela.

The theme that has united these three men in their own lives was and is *reconciliation*. If there is one task surely that is the challenge for our time, that is at the heart of the good news about Jesus Christ, it is the one discovered by those three men in prison and in their lives since: reconciliation. And it is the task at the heart of being a pastor.

Our Gospel reading (John 21) describes the risen Christ giving Peter breakfast by the Sea of Galilee. One detail in this story is crucial. We are told Jesus cooked the breakfast on a **charcoal fire**. When Peter, before the crucifixion, betrays Jesus three times in the High priest's courtyard and denies ever having known him,