

2026 TALK 27.9.26, ISAIAH 49:6-13, 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-15

GOD'S ECONOMY: 'NOT ONLY... BUT ALSO'

I have two stories for you, to begin with. The first is a long way from home - all the way from a tiny place - Malacatoya in Nicaragua. The 2nd story is very close to home. That's from last Sunday morning here at Carey.

First, let me tell you about a young mum, let's call her 'Griselda'. She had a 3 year old son, called Jose. (Can't help thinking of my oldest grandson here!). Anyway, Jose & his mum live out in the sticks. A little place without any medical centre nearby. One night, her little son was struggling more & more to breathe. But the rain was hammering down. And the stream next to Griselda's house was flowing very fast. So, it was impossible for Griselda to cross the stream to get help. She thought her son wasn't going to make it through the night. What would you do?... Yes, we would pray - ask for God's help. We might also phone 111 or 999. Neither of these calls would bring us help straight away.

Now I'm sure Griselda was already praying, in the midst of her rising panic about her son. But she knew what to do. She called Fatima on the phone... Now Fatima is not a doctor, not a nurse. But she *has* been trained by the AMOS programme as a local community health volunteer. AMOS is the programme, supported by Operation Agri, which we are giving to on this harvest Sunday. *(PHOTO of group of health volunteers... This is Fatima, centre of photo)...*

Back to our story. Fatima was able to listen to Griselda tell her about Jose's condition. Because of her training, she knows how to calm Griselda. She knows what questions to ask about Jose. Thankfully, Griselda does have some medication to hand. So, Fatima advises her of the correct dose to give to Jose. Come the morning, Jose has picked up a bit. Thankfully, the rain has stopped (another answer to prayer). So, Griselda can now cross the stream with Jose, to take him to show to Fatima. Fatima is able to diagnose that Jose has severe pneumonia. Jose spends 5 days in the nearest hospital. Today, he is home, healthy & smiling. God's salvation at work. Thanks be to God!

Now I have a number of reactions to this simple but moving story. I can't help thinking, for example, that the health care in this remote place in Nicaragua, is arguably better than what we have here in the UK at present. I think I would prefer to be on the phone to Fatima than to 111... I think I would prefer to pray

& wait for God to answer than to wait hours for an ambulance to finally turn up. (That's not to be critical of great work done by our paramedics BTW...).

What it makes me think is that these poor communities with limited resources in Nicaragua have hit on something here. They are making the most of the rich resources they do have: that is the local people. The local people don't have a higher education. But they do have an education in compassion. They know how difficult it can be, just living in somewhere like Malacatoya. They know that in order to survive, they will all need the help of their neighbours, one time or another. So, by giving a few hours in being trained as health volunteers, these locals are more equipped to help their neighbours. This is 'community enrichment' at its best. Alleluia! (**PHOTO** – thank God for the health volunteers of Malacatoya. Thank God that our gifts today will provide training for people in other parts of Nicaragua, to provide health advice, where it's needed).

Let's consider our 2nd story, much closer to home. If you were here last Sunday, I hope you will be able to recall something of the story of Precious, from Zambia. We watched a video of Precious sharing from her life. Also about how she is now campaigning for debt forgiveness from the banks, for her country & for further help from the international community to combat climate change.

Precious said: due to an unprecedented storm, her father had lost his family home – the land where he had buried his wife. When Precious was able to visit her father, she saw him crying bitter tears. And she joined with her tears too.

Imagine my surprise when, after the service, someone strongly challenged me about this video. They were saying, in effect, that the UK can't possibly help everyone. That people here are facing their own financial challenges. Which, of course is true. Now I'm not seeking to 'name & shame' this person. I'm not planning to give much in the way of detail about our conversation. (You may be relieved to know that they are not here today, as I knew they wouldn't be). It's **not** my role as a preacher to make people feel guilty. It's **not** my role to talk critically about people when they are not present. However, it **is** my role to point people to Jesus. And to encourage us all to follow the example of Jesus & think & behave differently from the way of this world.

What does it tell you about our world, when people hear a very sad story about someone's life, but their hearts are not softened by it? When people are unable to feel compassion about another person's woeful situation? It tells us

that too many people are suffering 'compassion fatigue'. It tells us that our tabloid press has for years, been training people to have an immediate, negative reaction to the needs of others... What a world, where we are trained to have a knee-jerk reaction against people in need.

Let's turn to scripture on this harvest Sunday. You might be thinking: thank goodness! About time! That's a relief... Some good news at last! Yes, this is the good news. But it is good news with a warning & a challenge to us & our world.

In his letter to his fellow Christians in Corinth, Paul gives us a wonderful vision of the riches of **God's 'commonwealth'**. How many words in these few verses give us a verbal demonstration of what we see here in today's wonderful harvest display? Let's list the many, many words Paul uses to build & build this picture of the way God's kingdom works: 12 words, some of them repeated: **'generous, cheerful, abundant, abounding, scattering, supplying, increasing, enlarging, enriching, thanksgiving, overflowing, surpassing'**. It's all grace... Do you begin to get the picture of how the economy of God's Kingdom works...?

This is a Kingdom of 'not only... but also'. The people of Corinth were able to say: 'Not only have we helped other people, but this has caused a giant ripple effect of more thanksgiving. And this has resulted in God being praised & more people giving cheerfully to help other people. And so on. And on & on. It's not like the kingdoms of this world, which are always saying: 'We don't have enough!. We couldn't possibly be generous. We couldn't possibly give to help THOSE people... There's not enough resources to go around!'

You see, there's too many blockages to the free flow of resources in our world. Too many already rich people hoarding what they think are 'their riches'. So, no wonder if it feels as if there is not enough to go around. There is plenty enough if we learn two simple lessons from Nicaragua & from this letter of the Apostle Paul. ***We must learn to always give thanks to God & to share what we have.*** Sounds simple doesn't it? But, I know from personal experience, what a difficult, daily challenge it is to trust God with 'my finances'...

God's kingdom is an abundant Kingdom which starts with thanksgiving & ends with more thanksgiving. It is a Kingdom of 'more & more' - of divine multiplication. The more we give to others, the more we find ourselves receiving. The more we see that none of what we have is ours, the more we will be thankful for what we **do** have **and** be able to cheerfully give to others.

And the more we do that, the more people will be helped & more thanksgiving will rightly be given to God. This is the good news of God's commonwealth, God's annual & daily harvest. Wonderful isn't it? Wonderful that **we** can play our part in God's richest commonwealth. We're doing that today as we give, from our hearts, to Operation Agri & to God's work in some of the poorest parts of our world. Alleluia !

But as I said, this good news does come with a warning. 'If we sow sparingly, we will reap sparingly'. This isn't me about to launch into teaching about tithing. No! All too easily, expecting a tithe can end up being something that is done, not cheerfully, but under a sense of compulsion. Not at all what Paul understands about a real harvest & true thanksgiving.

As Paul says here, giving comes from our hearts. It is not about a particular amount or proportion being given. It's about an attitude of gratitude. More than that, it's about giving ourselves wholly to God – 'ourselves, our time, our money'. Because none of it is actually 'ours' anyway. As Paul puts it elsewhere: 'What do we have that we have not received?'.

We need to challenge the mind-set of those who are loudly shouting: 'charity begins at home'. To all those who would attempt to pull up the drawbridge of the English-man's home, his castle. Those trying to do the impossible & drawing a line in God's compassion towards all creation & all the people of this earth. How preposterous! I remember a fellow leader of my previous church, talking critically about those living on benefits as being 'spongers'. He felt that such people were not worthy of his or the church's time or attention. And I was able to say to him: "We are all 'spongers' off God's generosity"... Aren't we...?

Let's learn from the people of Nicaragua today. They were not able to give much in the way of money. But instead, they recognised the resources, the riches they do have: Local people wanting to help. People willing to give their time to be trained to help others. They gave with their hearts. Just as Paul talks of those who had received help from Corinth, offering prayers for them, as their hearts went out to their fellow believers.

If you don't have much money, perhaps God is calling you to give some time. Time to help your community. Perhaps time to help your church on the occasional Sunday, serving refreshments after morning worship? Whatever it is, we are called to give from our heart, to give cheerfully. Just as Jesus gave

himself for us, we too are called to give not just a part, but all of our hearts. We know that the foundation stone of all giving is Jesus! Paul closes this purple passage by declaring: 'Thanks be to God for God's indescribable gift – of Jesus!'

The prophet Isaiah saw how preposterous it is to draw a line in God's compassion. Yes, charity should begin at home, with our hearts, but it doesn't end there. I will finish by reading the opening verse of our passage from Isaiah: (READ ISAIAH 49:6)... Amen! Thanks be to God !