

Vicar's Sermon

Date : Sun 09/03/2008
Title : Church Finances – the constant struggle.
Author : Rev. Peter Holzapfel, St. Mary's Church, Kempsey, Worcester.
Subject : Giving to the Church to help ensure its future.

"We love because God first loved us" This could be re-translated to read "We GIVE because God first GAVE to us." "All things come from you, O God, and of your own do we give You."

There are three things that are not generally spoken of: political preferences, sex lives and money. But, I'm afraid that this morning I have to break that rule and the one I'm going to address is money and specifically the amount that you give to the work of God here at St Mary's Church. Because both politics and sex will not directly impinge on the future of this church but money, or the lack of it, most certainly will.

I don't know and have never known what any individual gives to this church nor do I ever need to know and so in no way is this address aimed at any particular person. Nor do I speak on this subject very often and, therefore, I like to think that I have the right to be heard when I do.

Firstly, why do we need to look at it? The fact is that St Mary's is in considerable debt and is not paying its way. Each year, as hopefully you know, we are obliged to pay a Parish Share to the Diocese of Worcester which is currently set at £46,000. This money is largely passed on to central Church funds to cover the costs of clergy wages, pensions and provision of clergy housing. It is the duty of each church to pay this share because you're effectively paying for your minister and without a minister the life and witness of any church would be severely jeopardised.

At this time our church owes the Diocese £14,000 from 2005: £4,000 from last year 2007 and we have yet to start paying anything towards the £46,000 that we owe for this year (2008). This totals £64,000 at present.

In addition to this are the day to day running costs of St Mary's including repairs, lighting and heating and insurance. This excludes the extensive work that needs to be done on the Lady Chapel side of the church for which estimates are in excess of £200,000. We hope to be able to gain a grant from English Heritage to cover the cost of these works because there is no other way that they can be contemplated.

We are in significant debt and the Diocese of Worcester are inevitably and understandably putting pressure on myself and the PCC to come up with the money because they themselves are under an obligation to pass it on.

This is currently the situation and without a substantial increase in congregational giving not only will we fail to meet our obligations but year by year the debt will increase and the situation become worse to the point that eventually this church's right to have a minister will be questioned. I emphasise that there is no financial help whatsoever coming from the National Church or from any other body. We stand alone with our debt but if it isn't paid then we will not stand forever.

Secondly, what is the current state of our giving and what remedy is necessary? On an average Sunday the collection amounts to between £350 and £450 and although this may seem a large amount most of it comes through the envelope and covenant scheme which give good rates of interest and tax relief. **I cannot emphasise enough how important it is for our regular givers to covenant their giving so that we gain additional financial benefits. All you have to do is to seek the advice of the Church Treasurer (Trevor Lloyd-Adams or David Hassell) and they will point you in the right direction. OUR COVENANT GIVERS MUST INCREASE and this will be at no cost to anyone except the government who will give us increased relief.**

The remainder is loose cash on the collection plate and this, I'm afraid, at all services, is often in one or two pound coins. I am reluctant to speak like this because we are genuinely grateful for

every penny that is donated towards this church but to put £1 on the plate each week is simply not enough and is, in fact, derisory. It is interesting to see what you can buy for £1 in Tesco's....hardly anything! And the church will not survive on the cost of a bar of chocolate each week!

The fact and the truth is that we need at least £5 from each person per week if St Mary's is going to pay its way and survive. Nothing less will be sufficient to keep it going and that is a minimum. And so whether you covenant, use the envelope scheme or give on the plate this is what everyone needs to consider. Some people will give more than this already and some will give less but all of you need to prayerfully consider the amount you give for the work of God here in this parish considering and comparing what you give to the church with what you give to other aspects of your life.

This is the situation and this is the only solution for nothing less will ensure our future.

And so, finally, why give? The reason seems fairly obvious: to secure our church finances, to pay our debts and meet our obligations, and to safeguard the future life and ministry of this church. But, of course, there is an even better reason and that is because of what God, in Jesus, has done for you and so, prayerfully considering financial giving, is a real test of our faith. Is this something that we really believe in and appreciate enough to pay for? I know that some of you have compared yourself with the new Baptist Church on St Peter's and wondered why their giving is in the thousands each week: could it not be that God has so profoundly touched their hearts with gratitude for His love and sacrifice that they willingly sacrifice what they have to Him? So much so that many of them will adhere to the old Biblical principle of tithing: that is, giving a tenth of all that they earn to the work of God. It's always been different in the Church of England but I'm afraid that it can't afford to be different any longer and time is running out.

God so loved the world that He GAVE His only begotten Son. God's giving knew no limits: He gave until it hurt: should that not inspire us to give in return? If the lights of Christendom go finally out in this country I would not like to think that it was because we failed to give at the time when it was most necessary. That time is now and the decision is yours remembering that all things come from You, O Lord, and of your own do we give you.

Amen.

Peter

Rev. Peter Holzapfel

vicar@stmaryskempsey.org.uk

www.stmaryskempsey.org.uk