

Remembrance Sunday & Dedicated Giving

What I am going to attempt to do in this morning's sermon is to address the matter of giving. Today is Remembrance Sunday when we remember those men and women who gave their lives in armed conflict especially the two world wars. But today is also the day when we at St Paul's are handing out a letter and pledging card for 2012. So in this sermon I'm going to try and tie these two forms of giving together by means of the 5 "S's" of dedicated giving.

Now to compare the giving of money, time and talents to God via the Church to the giving of ones life for ones country is to insult the memory of those many millions who died in WW1 and WW2. I'm not trying to compare them but rather to show you how the 5 S's of giving make them similar.

What are these five S's of dedicated giving I keep referring to? They are five adjectives all starting with the letter S which one can put before the word "Giving" to explain the way we should give to the church. Unfortunately this is not multiply choice where we can pick one or two of the five S's that suit us or we find comfortable. When it comes to giving all five must be applied. In the same way all five do apply to those who were willing to commit themselves to fight and to die for our country and for the cause of universal peace and justice. The five adjectival S's are Scriptural, spiritual, systematic, spontaneous and sacrificial. Really, I should be spending 5 weeks giving each of these a separate Sunday. So to try and squeeze them all into a 10 minute homily on one day and also refer to those who we remember on Remembrance Day is perhaps foolhardy but let see...

If we are to even skim through the scriptures we would soon find the numerous mentioning of how we should behave with our money and in particular how we should give to God a share of we have.

A few examples:

1 Timothy 6:6-7, 17-19

Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it;... As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Mal 3:8-10

Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, 'How are we robbing you?' In your tithes and offerings! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

Proverbs 19:17

Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full.

Proverbs 3: 9

Honour the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce;

2Cor 9:6-7

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

I could go on quoting scripture at you which stress the need for us to give for the rest of this sermon so let's take it as read that giving to God is scriptural. But what about those who have died in armed conflict? Did they fulfil a

scriptural imperative to offer their lives in wars and conflicts? To a certain extent they did. They were fighting for what they believed was right and a God given command. And this applies to those on both sides. Was it Bob Dylan who sang a protest folk song about how each side in a conflict claims that God is on their side.

The Second “s” is spiritual – our giving must be spiritual. If you remember I have defined spirituality as our relationship with God. All those scriptural texts I quoted just now about giving will be meaningless unless we have a relationship with God that enables those texts to not only enter our heads but also our hearts. The previous Archbishop asked a few years ago whether our Anglican lack of generosity in giving wasn’t perhaps a spiritual problem that we needed to address. People who barely gave 1% of their incomes as Anglicans would cross the road to a Pentecostal Church and have no hesitation in giving a full tithe 10% of their pay-packet and that before deduction no gal! Do we have a spiritual problem in our giving?

And those young men and women who went off to fight but never returned. Was their commitment a spiritual one? Surely not. Well, all those pictures of Field-Marshal Kitchener point at them out of posters would be just as meaningless as the scriptures I quoted unless they could relate to the message from their hearts, unless they believed that they were doing what God wanted them to do. In that respect the giving of their lives was spiritual.

S number three is Systematic – we must give systematically – not just when we have a bit over at the end of the month or when we feel like it. That is why we encourage you to give via a stop order. This method does have both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are that your giving is systematic and regular. It doesn’t depend on whether you have decided to buy those lovely shoes you saw, it comes off automatically. It is also an advantage to the Church because whether you are here or on holiday overseas for a couple of months the money will still be transferred. The disadvantages are perhaps we do not feel the giving, we forget that we are giving because we are not consciously placing a couple of R100 notes into an envelope. Also when the new year starts, if we want to increase our giving it means a visit to the bank and filling in of copious forms to increase our stop orders. But those issues apart, it is good that we give systematically.

Those young men and women who marched off to their death in the wars and armed conflict did so systematically. They didn’t just go haphazardly to those places where they would like to fight. They fell under the systematic command of the defence forces, they were trained to do specific tasks – fire artillery, be infantrymen, drive tanks, sail ships, fly planes; all very systematic, hierarchical and structured.

But the fourth S is also significant – giving must be spontaneous. What do I mean? Isn’t this the exact opposite of giving systematically? Yes and no. What I believe is meant by giving spontaneously mean there will be occasions when special appeals or moving sermons might encourage us to give more than our already pledged amount; to be spontaneous as the situations demand. For example, Pat van der Rede is organising an end of year outing for the elderly in the parish, especially those who can’t afford to do anything special at this time of the year. Pat’s got a budget of about R2000 for this event and perhaps some of you might like to spontaneously give a contribution for this event. There will be a retiring collection next Sunday.

I am sure amongst those whose names we will be reading out from the War Memorials, there were those who did more than they were ordered to do, those who went the extra mile to capture a machinegun post, to rescue a shipmate from shark-infested water, crash-landing their aircraft only after the rest of the crew had parachuted to safety. Their spontaneous giving saved the lives of mates and fellow servicemen and women.

Shortly I’m going to call out the names of those paid the greatest sacrifice; they gave their very lives so that we can have the freedom we do have to worship God. They gave their lives because they believed what they were doing was right, scripturally, spiritually, systematically and spontaneously. So their giving became sacrificial. Very few of us would have heard of these men and women. In the choir anthem – *Let us now praise famous men*, there is a

delightfully sudden change of key as the choir sings: *“but some there be which have no memorial who have perished as though they have never been Their bodies are buried in peace but their name liveth for evermore.”* It is those names which will live forever more as we read them every Remembrance Sunday.

Jesus said: *No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.*

God loves us so much that he gave his only son so that all who believe in him may have eternal life. God loves us sacrificially. Do we love sacrificially enough to give sacrificially? You have been given an envelope containing a letter thanking you for your pledge giving thus far this year and showing how we have tried to keep in budget. There is also a request for you to increase your giving to match inflation. Before you fill in the Pledging Card ready to return next Sunday won’t you please remember those five S’s I’ve been talking about – do you remember them? Scriptural, spiritual, systematic, spontaneous and sacrificial then see whether your giving follows these five S’s.