

Sunday 7 October 2018 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 & 9.30 a.m.		Dedication & Stewardship (2) Baptism 27th Sunday of the Year B Pentecost 20
1 Chron 29: 10-13	Ps 145:13-17	2 Cor 8:7-15
		Luke 19:1-10
THE OPEN HANDS OF GOD		

“Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power, the glory, the splendour, and the majesty; for everything in heaven and on earth is yours...” (1 Chron 29:11),,, “All things come from you and of your own do we give you.”

BAPTISM

It is very special to welcome the Marcus family here for the baptism of Glenville and Melissa’s baby, Mizaan (Gail Mia), together with godparents and friends. Baptism always happens in the context of faith; it is our response as parents to the love of God through his Son Jesus Christ; we bring our children to God that they may be included in the covenant of faith, receive salvation and become part of the family of the church.

The intention of course is that baptism is the beginning of our Christian life. Like all children, we need to grow up not only physically but also, very importantly, spiritually! We cannot and should not remain infants, babies, in our faith, all our lives! That would be tragic! So the promises that we make as parents and godparents, to bring up our children as loyal members of the church, is very important – that our children learn with us, worship with us, hear the good news of Jesus with us, be living members of the body of Christ with us.

OUR READINGS

We continue with our Dedication and Stewardship series. Last week, the sermon title was “Why is money so important to God?” This week, “The Open Hands of God”- we root or ground our stewardship of what we have been given, on the generous nature of God.

Our readings give us three themes.

1 Chronicles 29:10-13 – Provision. God’s provision for his people, having blessed them with all that they need, giving them abundance. The prayer of David that we had read to us echoes that theme. God’s provision for his people.

Ps 145:15-16 echoes that theme: “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.”

2 Corinthians 8:7-15 – Sharing, following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. “There is no question of relieving others at the cost of hardship to yourselves; it is a question of equality. At the moment your surplus meets their need, but one day your need may be met from their surplus. The aim is equality...” (vv 13-14). Those who have much are called to share with those who have little.

Luke 19:1-10 – Restitution - the story of Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, who, when Jesus meets him and comes to his home, says those profound words of conversion and restitution, making right where he had gone wrong: “I give half my possessions to charity; and if I have defrauded anyone, I will repay him four times over.” (v 8). Those who have stolen, who have made themselves rich through corruption, are invited to meet Jesus and come to this act of radical repentance. Restitution.

THE OPEN HANDS OF GOD (1)

But let's return to our first reading. It is part of a prayer of King David, at the height of his reign and rule as king. The nation is strong. The people are prosperous. Enemies are far away. David is the great and wise king who has led the people into victory, into this place of blessing. His son Solomon is about to ascend to the throne. David has gathered all the resources needed for Solomon to build the temple in Jerusalem.

And now the whole community, the whole assembly, the nation, are gathered in worship, bringing their gifts to the altar, the place of worship: gold and silver and bronze and iron and precious stones. "Then the people rejoiced because these had given willingly, for with single mind they had offered freely to the Lord; King David also rejoiced greatly." (1 Chron 29:9)

Then David prays his prayer of thanksgiving. His prayer makes three statements on the nature of God: "Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our father Israel, for ever and ever." – God is everlasting; "Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory and the majesty, for everything in heaven and on earth is yours..." – the overwhelming power and wonder that is of God; "Riches and honour come from you... and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all." – the open hands of God, who gives and who blesses. The generosity of God.

God is everlasting; the overwhelming power and wonder that is of God; it is God who gives and who blesses – the open hands of God.

And in response to God, the people give and pour out their offerings, their lives, in worship and in adoration and in gratitude. The people are faithful. God blesses their faithfulness. God pours out his generosity upon them. They respond to the open hands of God with love and thanksgiving and offering.

THE OPEN HANDS OF GOD (2)

At the same time, the reading presents us with a number of difficulties, questions, inconsistencies. When communities live in poverty, when potholes and rubbish lie all over the place, where is God's generosity? When you or I are unemployed, searching eagerly and desperately for work, for a job, and find nothing – where is God's generosity? When SA has an unemployment rate of 36%, and a youth unemployment rate of 67%, where is God's generosity?

The answers lie to some extent in our other two readings: the Corinthian church, who are asked to share from their abundance and give to those who had little, and in so doing they become a sign of God's generosity; and the example of Zacchaeus, with his radical repentance and act of restitution, and becomes a living witness to the generosity of God.

These are acts that we need to apply to our life as a country – sharing, restitution, paying back what has been stolen or dishonestly gained, caring for one another, for those who are struggling; and also call us to ask hard questions about systems and structures that lock people into poverty, into slums, into poor housing, and that allow gangs and thugs to rule communities with fear and terror and intimidation. We need to ask hard questions of those who are responsible for the economic wellbeing of our country. And you and I can be part of this with acts of generosity: helping someone with a meal; giving to the grocery basket; helping an employee, or Gift the car guard, with getting their house built. Giving with the open hands of God.

The open hands of God are so different from our hands. We tend to grab and clutch. As babies, we grab and hold onto our parents. As toddlers, we grab toys and rattles. As young teens, we grab and hold onto our cell phones. As students, we grab that degree! At work, we grab the rungs of the ladder as we climb up. In our advancing years, we grab and hold onto the security of pensions and savings.

But God's hands are very different. They are wide open to us. God's hands reach out to you and me. God's hands reach out with invitation to this child being baptised today. God's hands stretch out on the cross of Christ. God's hands of generous love reach out and invite us to trust, to let go, to rest in him, to walk in faith, to clasp the hands of God, especially in these uncertain and fragile times.

Today is Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu's 87th birthday, and we wish him a very happy birthday! He tells the story of the man who fell over a cliff, grabbed a branch, held on tight, and called out, "Is anyone up there?" A voice comes back, "Yes, it is I, God. Let go of the branch!" The man looks around desperately. Then he shouts, "Is anyone else up there?"

CONCLUSION

The Lord invites us to let go of the branch, and to trust. Jesus called Zacchaeus down from the tree into a new relationship of trust. Paul invited the Christians at Corinth to share from their abundance with those who were struggling. You and I are invited to be generous because we have experienced the generosity of God. God invites you and me into a deeper relationship with Him, into a place of trust; no longer grabbing and clasping, but opening our hearts and opening our hands. Trust - trust for our lives, trust for our money and our finances, trust for our well-being, trust for our future.

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