

The logo features a large white circle with a blue and orange arc above it and a blue and orange arc below it. The text 'GENEROUS' is in orange, 'june' is in blue, and there is a blue square to the left of 'GENEROUS'.

■ GENEROUS
june

REFLECTION
BOOKLET
2022



The Generous June Daily Reflection Booklet

Welcome to Generous June 2022!

Generous June is an initiative that seeks to engage churches, communities and individuals with generosity throughout the month of June – we're so excited to go on this journey with you!

Within this booklet you will find 22 individual written reflections, one for each weekday throughout the month of June. Join with voices across the diocese and beyond, as we delve into Mark's Gospel, and reflect on the biblical truths of giving and generosity.

This booklet is designed to accompany the Generous June Podcast that will be released daily on the Generous June website, and on Apple Podcasts and Spotify. We understand that not everyone has access to a downloadable podcast service, so we have produced this booklet so that a hard copy of the reflections is available and can be read by you at your leisure, in your own time and at your pace.

Feel free to print this booklet for yourself and use it personally, or if you are a church leader then you might consider printing a few of these booklets and handing them out to those who don't have access to a computer and still want to be a part of Generous June 2022. Please do ask if you would like the Generous June Team to print a batch of these booklets for you, as this can be arranged on a case by case basis.

“Keep on paying attention to the miracles and wonders that tell us again and again who Jesus is.” - Richard Brand June 14th

“Through his death we become heirs of the Kingdom, heirs of the most generous inheritance imaginable.” - Sarah McClelland June 30th

Mark 1:1-11 Baptism

This is our first podcast in a series I hope you'll find yourself drawn into over the next month. And this one is from Chapter One. You will know the story. John the Baptist has made an extraordinary statement in the desert. He said he was a voice crying out to prepare the way for the one who's coming and to his surprise, Jesus turns up and he asks John to baptise him.

John is horrified – “but you're the one I've been waiting for. Why would I baptise you?” But Jesus knowing that this was part of God's plan for him part of him identifying with us, agrees to be baptised. And so he goes into the waters of the river Jordan, and many of us when we're baptised today, and when we conduct baptism services, we recall the baptism of Jesus.

There is a decisive moment when heaven touches Earth. And sure enough, in Jesus' baptism, heaven does tangibly touch Earth, because there is a voice from heaven. “This is my son, whom I love, and with whom I'm well pleased.” I find as a Bishop, whenever I'm baptising or confirming, in fact, whenever I'm visiting a church, I'm praying: “Lord, would you speak to me and to every person here?” I use words that confirmation: “Luke, the Lord has called you by name, made you his own.”

There's a sort of echo, isn't there, of the Father speaking over the son, but that's what it is for us to be followers of Christ. Jesus called us as co-heirs of the kingdom with Him, chosen at the same by our Heavenly Father.

I think our journey into the character and nature of God, our journey, if you like into generosity, is just that. It's discovering more of who God is, and what God thinks of us and discovering a sort of a cycle of grace and gift that as the Lord speaks blessing over us, so almost to the core of our being, we want to begin to reflect that in how we treat other people.

And so today, I wonder if you would do two things: Would you listen for the whisper of God, of what he was saying of you? And then would you find your eyes opened? As you watch for what's going on.

Who is it the Lord is asking you to draw alongside and encourage with a word of blessing? Affirm what you see as good delight in what you see as true. And find yourself perhaps, being prompted to moments of generosity because God has stirred something in your heart. And if that happens, there is a cycle of grace going on, rather like what happened to John the Baptist, compelled by his prophetic gift to call a nation to change its mind about themselves and about God. In one moment, his cousin arrives - Jesus, but in the baptism of Jesus, a new cycle of grace has started.
May the Lord bless you with his presence today.

Mark 1:12-20

Being Tested and Following Jesus

I find this passage fascinating. Grown men, hard at work, getting on with their business, when this seemingly random guy comes along and says “Come, stop what you’re doing, forgo your normal routine, your income and your life, and follow me.” I would probably have a few questions first, maybe ask about where we’re going, what we’ll be doing, and a guarantee of a meal or two, or some money, or some results.

But Simon, Andrew, James and John see Jesus, and are straight in – no questions asked.

On the face of it, this might seem a little crazy. But what does it say about the men in question? And what does it tell us about Jesus?

I think Jesus picked these men because they had an open mind and an open heart and, in all honesty, a spirit of wanting something more, an inquisitive nature. But it’s deeper than this, they have a spirit of wanting to know God more, and they knew, there and then, that their route to knowing God more was to let go of everything they knew, to follow Jesus.

Now these men had the chance to literally follow Jesus and journey with him every day, eat with him, spend time with him, and whatever risk their inquisitive nature carried them into was surely worth it – their lives were turned upside down – but the rewards of knowing the true Son of God were boundless.

Generosity is a concept that is often tied up in how we spend what we have. Our money, our time, our outputs. But I think generosity can be expressed through our ability to be open. Open hearts, open minds, open eyes and open ears to know what opportunities we have to stop what we’re doing, to break out of our routines and to follow Jesus. Generosity can be having an attitude of inquisitiveness, or intrigue into how better we can follow him in our day to day lives, to get a better glimpse of the true life he led, and the relationship we can build with him.

Thomas Wharton

Vicar - Romsey

The logo for 'Generous June' features the word 'GENEROUS' in a small, orange, sans-serif font above the word 'june' in a larger, blue, lowercase sans-serif font. The text is enclosed within a circular graphic composed of two overlapping arcs, one orange and one blue, creating a partial circle effect.

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Mark 1:20-2:12

Healing

I had the privilege of living in South Africa between 1994 and 2000. I wasn't there as a vicar but as a cellist working in a chamber orchestra. What stays in my memory from those years, was the experience of living among many South Africans who had a shared sense of hope about the future. It was during the time of Nelson Mandela's presidency and when Archbishop Tutu coined the term, the 'Rainbow Nation'.

There was one moment in particular that captured that hope. It was during the Rugby World Cup Final in 1995 when South Africa played New Zealand. Mandela walked onto the pitch wearing a green Springbok jersey and he had a special message for the only coloured member of the team, Chester Williams. 'I'm proud of you' he said. The Springbok was seen by some as the symbol of the oppressive apartheid regime, which segregated people by their race and colour of skin, and many advised Mandela not to wear it. But in that simple, generous, gesture, Mandela communicated a message that said we belong together, we can heal from past suffering and injustice, we can build a bright future. The film *Invictus* is worth a watch and captures this beautiful moment.

Generosity and healing. We might not naturally put these two together. But where there is real generosity, that reflects God's overflowing generosity, healing and restoration are never far behind.

In the early chapters of Mark's gospel, we read of Jesus bringing God's healing to various afflicted people. A man deeply troubled by an unclean spirit. Simon's mother suffering with a fever. Crowds of people searching for Jesus. A leper cut off socially and religiously through his disease. Jesus acts out God's overflowing generosity and says 'be made clean', he restores broken people back to community, and heals many to life and service.

Very often we are tempted to think how limited we are, how lacking in necessary resources, skills and experience, how our afflictions prevent us from being really fruitful. But time and again, God surprises us. When we use our gifts and limited resources, generously, alongside others and in prayer and faith, God's abundance so often shines out. Generosity, rooted in prayer brings about God's healing and abundance.

Lord, teach us to grow in generosity that the healing of your Kingdom may grow through us. Amen.

June 3rd

Mark 4:1-20

The Parable of the Sower

In our reading today Jesus tells the Parable of the Sower which represents four different ways people respond to God's message. Usually, we think Jesus was talking about four different types of people. But he may also have been talking about different times or phases in a person's life, or how we willingly receive God's message in some areas of our lives and resist it in others.

For example, you may be open to God about your future, but closed concerning how you spend your money. You may respond like good soil to God's demand for worship, but like rocky soil to His demand to give to people in need. God calls us to be like good soil in every area of our lives at all times.

So, when it comes to generosity and Christian giving how are you sowing – richly (with joy) or reluctantly (out of duty and guilt – does it feel like a chore)? Friends, we need to sow (joyfully) before we can reap. There's a domino effect in giving; as we learn to give joyfully in response to God's love and grace it releases lots of other areas of their lives. It's interesting Jesus tells us it is 'more blessed to give than to receive'.

So, first, are we ready to trust God's promises? Second, which field are we sowing in? Our own or God's? We cannot separate money from lifestyle. We may have seed but if it is all sown in the field of our own personal choices then we miss out on the blessing twice. Once because no matter how much we sow in our own field it will never be enough. Second, because there will be little left to be sown in God's field.

Do we wish to be associated with God's work? Will we trust God sufficiently to put Him first in our financial lives as well as our weekly worship? Do we wish to contribute joyfully and generously to God's action in the world by being generous sowers of the seed and enjoying the harvest - across our churches and communities and in our own hearts as well!

Giving and generosity is part of the way we live out our discipleship and seek to become more like Jesus. It helps us grow in His image, it acts as a witness to others and helps us boldly proclaim the faith that's within us.

Mark 4:21-24
The Lamp on the Stand

A while back my father decided he was of an age where he needed to position a lamp behind him as he sat in his favourite chair as this would help him read more easily. We did some research and selected a modern looking standard lamp. Once the lamp had been purchased and put into position, we started checking out the different types of light it was able to emit – from soft night-time glow to bright daylight – and were amazed at the differences we perceived. The brightness of the light meant that my father was able to read without the aid of a magnifying glass. We were so thrilled at the difference this lamp made that we purchased one to sit beside my desk in the hope that it could shed light on the murky depths of some of the teetering piles that had been quietly growing.

What might a well targeted lamp look like for us in our daily living? Our lives, individually and as church, should offer to those around us the opportunity to see the world with a clearer focus than might otherwise be possible. Sometimes we will have to be subtle in our approach so that people are enabled to gently receive the love of God in a well-timed smile at a stranger or in the welcome of a quiet country church open each day to passersby. On other occasions we may wish to be very clear and definite in our spotlighting of things such as social injustice and unfairness as we use our homes or church buildings to host Foodbanks and other support agencies and charities that work with the marginalised and vulnerable.

My standard lamp has different light settings but it is easy to forget that it can be changed and over time I had become used to one setting that seemed to be all that was required. In preparing this reflection I was reminded that it was so much more than I was using it for and I picked up the remote control attachment to try out the different settings. I was disappointed to find that the options did not work but on checking discovered that there were no batteries in it. As we consider what Generous June means for us, take time to check you are connected to the One true power source that will give you energy and light to bring hope and love to those around.

Mark 4:26-33
Seeds

I'm a keen gardener. But an anxious one. Even - my family would say - a pessimistic one. Maybe that's why I'm only really let loose on the lawn. My wife does the clever stuff with plants and shrubs.

And with my lawn I'm always doubtful. I have a bit of seed, is it enough? Is this amount of preparation enough? Is this enough fertiliser? And I'm sure that holds me back. So my lawn isn't what it could be, but if I had a bit more faith in the One who gives the growth?

Sometimes that's how we are with our gifts we have to offer the Lord. We doubt. We think they're not enough. We think why even offer this little thing? How can it help?

The Parable of the Growing Seed at Mark 4 verse 26 shows us a quietly faithful sower. He sows, he goes about his other work, he sleeps. Night and day, whether he sleeps or wakes, the seed sprouts and grows; all by itself the soil produces grain—first the blade, then the ear, then the full kernel in the head; soon the grain is ripe and ready to harvest. God gives the growth.

And at verse 31 God gives growth even from the mustard seed, so tiny that it seems miraculous it could be really fruitful: the smallest of all seeds on earth - yet if we do plant it, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, even shading the birds.

We can have faith in God. What we have, and what we are, which seem to us so little, are what he needs for the building of his Kingdom and the safety of our own souls. Let us offer it with generosity and in faith.

All the world is God's own field, fruit unto his praise to yield; wheat and tares together sown, unto joy or sorrow grown. First the blade and then the ear, then the full corn shall appear: grant, O harvest Lord, that we wholesome grain and pure may be.

Mark 4:25-41 Calming the Storm

“Quiet! Be still.”

“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have little faith?”

Fear can come from many things – while being in a boat in a storm would conjure fear for a lot of people (me included), the fear itself comes from the unknown.

What will happen after we are battered by the waves? What will happen next? Will I be ok? Will things work out?

These fears manifest in our day to day lives too, especially in these unpredictable times. The past two years have seen our world shut down to a pandemic, storms hitting our homes, wars break out. We get stuck in the immediate, the panic of what to do. We sometimes can lose sight of what we have. When we talk of generosity, times like these can generate feelings of scarcity – both personally and in church finances. What if things don't change? We can't spend this now? We can't ask for this now? But we need to remember, just as the disciples needed to, that God is always with us, and Jesus is in control.

God provides, God provides in many ways, for our church during the pandemic we were hit, as were many, as we relied heavily on fundraising activities to boost our balance. This option was taken away from us, but God provides. We took the time to think about what God had gifted us – congregation members who could bake cakes and drop off, those who could run an online dance class, those who could lead a quiz on zoom. And so our online fair happened.

In times of panic we can lose sight of what we need, because of our focus on what we want.

Generosity comes in many forms for us and while not all the acts of generosity are those of money, the impact of these gifts have enabled us to continue with our mission and our ministry.

Being in an interregnum, in a pandemic, with dwindling volunteers was our storm. We felt drowned in admin and paperwork and just trying to steady the ship. But taking the time to think about what we needed as a church – Sunday services in person and online, and Messy Church allowed – focusing on these two important parts of our faith, bringing God's word to as many as possible. The generosity of the people who had their needs met became apparent.

Just as the disciples needed that small reminder – God is with us, our small acts can create dividends.

Mark 5:21-43
Faith and Healing

Why is it, that it's when you are at your busiest and most stressed, that someone approaches you in need of your help? You're rushing down the road to collect the children from school, you need to pick up milk and bread on the way and then you've got to drive them to swimming lessons, when your neighbour comes out and says that she has just had some bad news and needs someone to talk to about it. You're running to a meeting, on your phone to a colleague who needs a decision now, trying to plan in your head the talk you've got to give later, when an old man trips and falls to the ground just in front of you.

Now, I'm sure that Jesus had much more patience than us, but I wouldn't be surprised if there wasn't a little bit of stress as he faces people all around him in need. Like us, he had a choice to make – carry on with the plan and busy life or reach out in support to the person in need.

Let's look at this scenario in Mark. Jesus has crossed to the other side of the lake, probably to get some rest, where he discovers that a large crowd has already gathered – they're looking to learn more about him and listen to his teaching. Then a leader of the synagogue approaches him – his daughter is dying. As Jesus makes his way to help her, the crowd continues to press around him. And then comes the moment when he realises that someone has touched him in a way that has purpose and meaning – he calls out to the woman even though she has already been healed and in many ways the work has been done and nothing more is needed. But he wants to look her in the eyes – to talk to her – and reassure her of her faith. By this point the little girl has died ... but Jesus continues on his way towards her. He reaches out to her and calls to her – little girl get up. And she is raised to life.

Such a short passage but so many needs in one place – we can feel the tension and the pace of life. And yet Jesus offers his time and his care – he speaks face-to-face to both the woman and the little girl. He values them for who they are and he takes time for each of them. I wonder if our care for others is like that – individual, real and meaningful – or do we rush on with our busy lives, only caring when it's convenient. Amongst so many other things, this passage shows us that Jesus gives freely of his time for the sake of others. Let's be like him as we reach out to those in need who come across our paths.

Jenny Herrera

Executive Director - Acts 435

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Mark 6:30-44 Abundance

In our passage today Jesus does not actually plan to teach but rather retreat with his disciples to a solitary place. The crowd, however, have other ideas - hungry for God's word, they went ahead of Jesus to hear more from him.

Yet Jesus does not just ensure they receive spiritual food. He wants to ensure the people around him have their physical needs catered for as well as their spiritual. That is a good reminder for all of us working in ministry - what good is it to preach the word if we do not take care of a person's physical needs (as emphasised by James in his letter)?

The disciples jump to the conclusion that it would take eight months of a man's wages to feed everyone. Jesus simply asks "How many loaves do you have?" Let's not worry about how big the need is, let's look at what we have. Offer up the little we have to God and see His miraculous abundance.

So, the disciples gather five loaves and two fish, Jesus directs the people to sit down in an ordered way, gives thanks to God and the disciples dutifully hand out the food, and find to their astonishment that there is such abundance and they all ate and were satisfied AND there were leftovers too!

I have had the privilege of working for the online giving charity Acts 435 for the past twelve years. Much of what we do resonates with this story. Acts 435 seeks to meet the deeply practical needs of people struggling financially and do it in an ordered way. We show God's love in action through raising the money for a specific need - a pair of shoes, some food, electricity on the meter, a bed or a cooker.

If you focus on the needs out in our world it can feel totally overwhelming. Yet, if we look to our provider God, and offer to Him the little we have, our focus changes. We may not have 8 months of wages to give away, but perhaps we have £10, £20 or £50 to spare. I witness the beauty of individual people stepping in to help and the multiplication of that generosity to ensure all needs are provided for and people's lives transformed. For it is indeed more blessed to give than receive.

June 13th

Mark 6:45-56
Miracles

The seductive temptation, when we hear about miracles, is to seek an explanation. That's a bit like hearing a spine-tinglingly wonderful piece of music and responding by wanting to know if it is really all the composer's own work; or encountering a stunning piece of art and focussing on whether the artist cheated in her or his methods. Miracles are part of the beauty of God and the extravagant gift of God. In one sense they don't make sense, but that would be to miss the point. The point is to do with the 'who' of miracles, not the 'what'.

In the miracle of Mark 6:48 there is no necessary rescue mission that we are told about; some tough rowing, but hey, that's not untypical for this stretch of water. We even hear Jesus intended to pass by the rowers; just somewhat remarkably by walking past them on the water. The miracle is more of an epiphany: a moment of revelation of who Jesus is. And who Jesus is, is revealed further by his words, he uses his most repeated command, "Do not be afraid." Jesus is God with us (the promised Emmanuel of the Christmas story). With Jesus, we need never be afraid.

Notice though that although we hear the disciples were astounded, their hearts, we are told, were hardened. One act, however extraordinary, doesn't change everything. We know that in our lives; we sometimes get frustrated with ourselves when we find ourselves inspired to be more the people we aspire to be but all too quickly slipping back into our less attractive habits.

The trick, I believe, is this: to keep on paying attention to the miracles and wonders that tell us again and again who Jesus is and to keep on noticing the beauty of God's gifts; and then, with gratitude for all these things, daily responding in simple steps of generosity. The money we give, the extra mile we go for someone, our generosity of time, attention and presence given to others: all are part of a gracious rain of the love of God, which through God's wonders brings to life works of beauty seen in the healing and transformation of the lives of others, and in futures we may never have considered possible.

Mark 8:1-13

Generosity and Being Tested

I don't know about you but I'm not a big fan of the word 'test'. Tests can be difficult and trying, require patience and resilience, learning and putting knowledge into practice. As a teacher, part of my job is preparing students for tests and they'll tell you I often say "the more you practice the better you get". Granted I teach food so even mistakes are usually edible but it is absolutely the case that those who reflect on past learning and use it to improve the present see lasting change.

If we think about this in the context of Mark 8 verses 1-13, the disciples are challenged on whether they remember the previous example when Jesus took a child's lunch to feed 5,000 people. They are being tested - What Would Jesus Do? They know people are hungry and don't have any food, they know Jesus has compassion but appear to have forgotten how they play their part in bringing about change. Jesus asks them how many loaves of bread they have. He brings it back to what they have between them that they could share. And then, as he did before, he takes what they offer, gives thanks and multiplies it in abundance.

Jesus knows everything comes from God and we need reminding of this - testing here is about seeing if the disciples have recalled previous goodness and can be relied upon to act again. The other testing in this passage comes when the Pharisees test Jesus to see if he will perform miracles on a par with prophets such as Elijah and Moses - they want a bigger sign than breaking bread. But Jesus came for all people - not just the Jews - and satisfying the hunger of the crowds with the gifts of the disciples brought about far more lasting change than any bonfire for a religious few. Our God is not for showy miracles performed on demand to those in power.

God sees the hunger in our world and knows we have each been given different gifts to satisfy it. As a teacher my favourite part of the job is encouraging, nurturing, believing in and supporting my students to become better versions of themselves, to keep practising and using what they have to bring about lasting change. And I believe this is the message God has for us too because the more we practice generosity, the better at generosity we will get.

Mark 8:27-38

Take Up Your Cross

On the face of it, this is a passage that doesn't exactly scream 'generosity'. It's got quite an aggressive tone to it. There's stern words, rebuking and counter rebuking, and ends with the well-known verses regarding being ashamed of Christ and the consequences of that. Now I firmly believe no matter where you look in the Bible you can find generosity within the words because generosity is a core characteristic of God, and the same is true here. Whilst wrapped up in quite blunt terms, we see the gift of Christ himself to the world laid out in no uncertain terms. He's described as the Messiah, saviour of the world, and then goes on to teach of the great act of salvation that he brings through his life, death, and resurrection.

But for me the strongest generosity theme is the challenge in verse 36 "For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?" This speaks to the slightly upside-down nature of God's Kingdom. We live in a world that often strives for more... more clothes, more fun, more gadgets, more of everything. Even though we are living through a cost-of-living crisis for many, with vast swathes of society struggling with rising costs for heating, lighting, food etc, wider culture continues to push us to spend because by doing that "we will be fulfilled or made complete". But this isn't how we as Christians are called to live. No matter how much or how little we have, the key is how we hold on to it. If we hold tightly to our wealth and possession and don't share with the world around us then we are ashamed of God.

However, if we hold it lightly, knowing that all things come from God, and we are generous with all those things, then we are walking in step with Jesus. This is the challenge of generosity, to mirror that characteristic of God in all we do. To respond to God's never-ending generosity by allowing the world around us to experience that generosity through us and the way we interact with the world. And in doing so, we will be drawn closer to God, the true source of all life and fulfilment.

Louise Weatherall

Student & Young Adult Minister Christ Church - Winchester

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Mark 9:2-12

What Has Gone Before

If we think about who has been part of our faith journey, there will be people that come to mind, perhaps a close friend, a leader of your church, maybe a parent or grandparent. But there will also be people who we can't name. Those people who we don't know, but who have gone before us and have been generous in prayer, with their time and in their finances which has meant that we can live and worship in the way we do. In our passage, we read of the transfiguration of Jesus.

Moses and Elijah join Jesus and two of the disciples up a mountain - two people who have gone before and laid foundations of faith. Moses standing for the law and Elijah standing for the prophets, all becoming fulfilled in Jesus. These two men paved the way for faith in the way they gave themselves to God. Peter sees the wonder and glory of Jesus through the transfiguration, as Jesus' 'clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them', and it must have been pretty spectacular seeing Jesus speak with both Moses and Elijah. Like many of us would, Peter sees the good here and wants to stay, looking back at what has gone before.

We can, and should, look back in thanks at what has gone before and the generosity of people which has enabled us to have and maintain church buildings, to hold us up in prayer, to engage in mission in our contexts. Moses and Elijah did wonderful things, but it all pointed to Jesus. I believe the challenge here is using the beauty of what has gone before to spur us on in the work of Jesus. To grow in generosity and not stand still.

Jesus comes down from the mountain and his generous heart continues to work. When we think about who's been a part of our faith journey because of their generosity, those who we are aware of and those that we aren't, we must think about how our generosity can be part of other people's stories. What and who are we investing into in prayer, financially or with our time? How are we going to let the Spirit work in us to spur us on to not stay on the mountain, but to join in with the generous heart of Jesus?

June 17th

Mark 9:38-40

Giving in Jesus' Name

My daughter Esther, who is 4 years old, can ask the 'why' question after every other sentence. She is intelligent, beautiful, curious and has a very kind heart. Recently I asked her 'what does it mean to be kind', and her first response was: 'I don't know', but what soon followed was a list of things she felt were part of this; say kind things, share books, share toys, don't break anything, give people a cuddle and the list went on. So simple, and yet so significant, a bit like the glass of water which Jesus refers to in this passage in Mark.

We must understand that there was plenty of confusion under the disciples when Jesus addresses them in these verses. They had expected the Messiah to free them from the oppression of the Romans, but instead he introduces the Kingdom of heaven, where He came to serve, not to be served. And they are invited to follow him and his ways. To give in Jesus' name, even something that seemed as insignificant as a glass of water, makes the difference in this Kingdom. Today this passage reminds me, and hopefully you too, to be generous in the small things of life.

To be generous with our words, with our actions, with our belongings, with our attitude, with our time, with all that we have been given from the hand of God. We know that our reward is in heaven, and yet the reality is that we can already taste some of this here and now. Because giving brings joy, and indeed: 'It is better to give than it is to receive'. If you are short of inspiration; ask a child and they will gladly lead you in the right direction.

Mark 10:17-29

The Rich and the Kingdom of God

This passage has always made me uncomfortable. I was born into a middle class home in the Midlands. In Global terms, I have always been a rich person. Jesus doesn't seem to hold out much chance of my entering the Kingdom of God.

Now, I get that Jesus exaggerates. He uses hyperbole to make a point. My Latin teacher used to call us "sewer rats". I thought it was some Latin word, until one day the penny dropped. He meant rats that live in a sewer. It's probably not allowed these days, to call your pupils sewer rats. It was hyperbole, and for us it was water off a rat's back.

What is the point that Jesus is making? Perhaps he's illustrating the point that he makes several times elsewhere, that you can't serve two masters. You can't serve God and mammon, money, he says, otherwise you will love one and despise the other. Perhaps that is his point. We have to decide what matters the most: a fat pension or a big heart. The two can co-exist, but you have to be clear which one gets the priority. When push comes to shove, will you love your neighbour or keep the money in your account?

Perhaps he's making that point. Or perhaps he is making the point that Paul picks up in his letter to Timothy: 9 "Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." I think we all recognise the truth in those words.

Or perhaps his point is something about how this rich man's wealth comes between him and living his life with Jesus, which is surely the Kingdom of God. It's not the giving that is the main thing, it's the false sense of security that riches give him. Actually, it isn't a security at all, it is a prison. His wealth, which could buy him whatever he wants, actually stops him getting the one thing that he most wants - to experience eternal life.

There is such a paradox here. We work to build ourselves a little pot of money, so that it will allow us to do what we want. Then we don't do what we want to guard our little pot. Go figure!

Mark 11:12-27 Clearing the Temple

As people first encounter Jesus, the Jesus they so often focus on is the Jesus who turns water to wine, who heals the sick and embraces the poor. This is all obviously correct. But often when they get to a set of verses like Mark 11, especially Jesus' interactions with the money changers and salespeople in the temple and verse 15, they get hit at Jesus' identity crisis moment. The Jesus that they knew to be gentle, was acting in a different way, making a scene, flipping over tables. And whilst this is challenging to first read, more of Jesus and his character is being revealed to us in this chapter.

To set the scene: the temple, was the place of encounter, the one place that you could go to encounter God. The Gospels and the New Testament put such a great stress on encounter and encounter for all. Whether that is through Jesus' personally welcoming in marginalised groups like Samaritans or lepers or embracing women and children, who are so often overlooked. We can see that encounter with God is 100% on Jesus' agenda. We teach and practice encounter with the Holy Spirit now. Depending on your context, that may look different - it may be through the Eucharist or through sung worship, through prayer or through other ways. The context that Jesus was speaking into at the time, had one key way of encountering God, and this was at the temple. This was where people went to sacrifice animals to God. This is not just as a form of atonement for sins, but worship, and to give Him thanks, as well as the draw close to Him.

This theme of encounter is important when we look at the actions of the salespeople in the temple. They were not the same as your Cathedral bookshop, looking to enrich worshipers with books of faith. These are people selling animals to be a live offering to God. Whilst the convenience of this can be seen as a good thing, the general consensus was that the salespeople were not only charging crazy amounts of money for the sacrifices, disqualifying the less wealthy, but they were filling up the place of worship, the place of encounter.

Jesus makes a scene. This is the reason that Jesus makes a scene because encounter with God is 100% on Jesus' agenda, so much so that he will fight for it. That Jesus who flipped over tables and called out the salespeople as robbers is the same Jesus that wants an encounter with you. He wants to be present in your life today, and he will fight for it. As you go today, I challenge you to look at your own space and your own faith. Are you enabling people to encounter God or are you restricting certain types of people from doing so? Well, maybe you feel that there is no place for you to encounter God. Jesus' actions are for you to. Even if he has to make a scene, he will do it to make a way for you to encounter God.

Mark 12:13-17

Give to the Lord what is the Lord's

A key message of this passage is to 'give God what is his'.

Which raises the question, what exactly is 'his'?

The Bible makes clear that the earth and everything in it belong to God (Psalm 24:1), and that God created, sustains and loves the whole 'cosmos' (John 3:16) – yes, the word means the whole created order, not just humanity! It's all his, but he has entrusted us with looking after it all ('The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it' Genesis 2:15).

Can we (like God) love our diocese? We certainly are blessed with huge tracts of beautiful countryside which it is very easy for us to 'love', particularly at this time of year. However, God also loves (and no doubt grieves over) the polluted, degraded and less attractive parts. We need to work out what caring generously for them means as well!

So, if we're thinking about creation-care, what might it look like to make a generous response to God with 'what is his'?

- Making our churches examples of generosity: sharing our land to provide nature trails or quiet, reflective spaces or veg beds for our community; nurturing nature with pollinator-friendly planting or mowing; providing car-charging (particularly where most houses use on-street parking) or water-refill points (where not readily available); making church facilities available for community recycling, repair café or give-and-take schemes; taking part in (or initiating) local activities to improve the quality and use of land.
- Caring for our global neighbours generously: as individuals and parishes, adjusting our lifestyle to reduce our carbon emissions and the damage they cause to the world's poor communities. This should include changing our diet to eat less meat, walking and cycling more, avoiding flying, considering an electric car (if affordable), using renewable electricity, buying less 'stuff' so throwing away less, twinning our toilets so communities in the Majority World can have sanitary facilities.
- Helping others to appreciate creation and care for it: giving generously of our time and energy – particularly to young people, our 'future neighbours', and those who do not currently get out and about in nature. Learning about God's wonderful world is crucial to getting excited and inspired by it – and as a result, looking after it.

Generosity can be costly. But we follow a Saviour who didn't hesitate to pay the ultimate price for us!

Mark 12:38-44
Putting Everything In

I wonder if you've ever been in a place where wealth and status is proudly on show. Maybe you've been on holiday in the South of France or Greece and walked around the marina at dusk, admiring the huge yachts and observed with interest the beautiful people who are sitting boldly on deck in full view, sipping on cocktails and eating fresh lobster. Or perhaps you enjoy watching an awards ceremony – maybe the Oscars – and marvelled at the amazing gowns and suits being worn by celebrities who are treated as royalty and showered with gifts.

Wealth and status in themselves may not be wrong, but can so easily be abused when they are flaunted and used to demean others. And it is this behaviour that Jesus is speaking about – watch out for these people – they are lording it over others – they are not living in the way that honours God. What is worse is that he is talking about religious leaders – people who should be setting an example.

So the contrast between this behaviour and that of the widow in the temple couldn't be more stark. Here she comes – trying to avoid attention – and placing her tiny gift into the offering plate. Who would notice her? Who would think her gift was of any value at all? And yet it is this woman who Jesus spots and who he holds up as an example of godliness to the disciples. This woman doesn't hold back – she gives all she can and does so with humility.

I wonder what it would mean for us to give everything we could. It might be a financial gift, it might be our time, it might be our gifts and talents. But it could also be our pride, our status, our feeling of self-importance. Without the love of Jesus, we have nothing – I wonder if we know that and live like that. The widow's devotion to God is inspiring – all that mattered to her was to give in response to all that he had given her. We may not know her name, but her example has lasted now for over 2000 years. What a way to be remembered!

Mark 14:12-26 The Last Supper

In the intimacy of this Last Supper, Jesus opens his heart in honesty to his friends. He exposes his vulnerability. He confronts the hearts and minds of the twelve. 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.' (v18) The disciples are shocked, confused and refuse to entertain his words. "Surely, not I?" (v19) They deny the possibility of their own betrayal.

Undeterred, Jesus continues. He takes bread, gives thanks to God and breaks the bread. He invites his friends to partake. 'Take, this is my body.' In this, Jesus gives himself to his disciples, to take his life and presence into their lives in a very real way. Then, he took the cup, thanked God for it and gave the cup to them. All of them drank from it. Jesus said, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many' (Mk 14:22-24).

At this holy meal, Jesus offers the most sacred gift of his life and his eternal presence. At this supper, Jesus revealed the sacrificial way forward by offering himself to die upon the cross, and to be remembered in this way forever. We are called to serve as he did. Through sacrificial service, we extend the God's loving presence in the world.

Jesus embodied his teaching. He loved sacrificially for all people throughout his life by serving others: helping the poor, lifting up the marginalised, releasing captives, healing the sick, challenging the causes of poverty and oppression, and standing up for orphans and widows. Jesus made a point of recognising the humanity in all people and proclaiming God's love for all. In his earthly life, Jesus embodied the conviction that eternal life is found by giving it away.

In Jesus Christ, we find the true meaning of generosity and life. Generosity is a condition of the heart and a quality of being, not a condition offered by one's material wealth. In this way, we all have something to give no matter our material standing. Giving is a letting go of one's self for the well-being of the other person. It is a sacrificial openness and willingness to serve others in compassion, mercy and love. This is sacrificial generosity.

Amen.

Mark 15:27-31 & 66-72
Denial and Redemption

Oftentimes when I read this passage my head is filled with so many thoughts; 'Peter, you were warned and you STILL betrayed Jesus?', 'I would have never done this, maybe once but not three times!' I'm sure these thoughts would fill all of our heads. Jesus, in his time of suffering and need is denied by Peter; the very Peter who weeks later stands up at Pentecost proclaiming the Good News of Jesus, the very news he once repeatedly denied.

Upon reflection of this passage, it seems Peter fell into a trap we too often also find ourselves in, the denial of Him in place of ourselves, the denial of the Great for the 'good'. I wonder how often we have swatted away the prompting of generosity and have justified it through the practical needs we face? How often do we push back our bible reading WITH God to do something FOR God? May I suggest to us today that what Peter did here, although spectacularly terrible, is what we are guilty of more often than we'd like to admit.

When we address our finances, let's ask the question, are we yielding them to Him, to the Great or are consumed by our own need, what we perceive to be the 'good'? Are we focused on how our generosity can bless others or are we focused on how we can use it for ourselves? Are we denying the Great in place for the 'good'?

Gratefully, we learn through the story of Peter that there is redemption, there is change, there is hope. The infinite kindness of God meets us in our tight-fistedness and softens our hearts as He slowly helps us yield more and more of us to Him, our Great and Wonderful God. Let us be challenged today to use our finances for Him, to submit everything once again to Him and His glory recognising that He uses what we perceive to be 'our' money much better than we do.

Mark 15:33-41

The Greatest Gift is Death

Our journey in generosity continues today, as individuals and as a church. My reading today comes from Mark chapter 15. And it's that horrendous passage, isn't it? That describes the death of Jesus. There's a question going around my mind all the time when I read a passage like this. How could anyone possibly have taken such a lovely man as Jesus? The one that everyone flocked from their homes to hear? They forgot about their need for food. They were so compelled by what he had to say. But it wasn't only just what he had to say, it's what he did. You know, when you're around Him, exciting things happened. Water got turned to wine at a wedding. The sick got healed, the hungry got fed. You found yourself watching as he spotted people no one else could see - the woman on her own by a well, the blind beggar outside the city of Jericho, the embarrassed rather selfish rich man up a tree, Zacchaeus, in the middle of Jericho. Wherever he went he seemed to change what was going on.

He made people see things differently. He told stories that have them laughing one minute and crying the next. How could this man, the most lovely compelling man who'd ever lived, be taken and crucified outside the city of Jerusalem? But what we do know, because half the Gospel record is taken up with the last week of his life, is that he consistently took steps towards the moment of crisis when he was going to be tried, condemned and executed outside the city.

The most harrowing cry that Jesus ever made in his life, is quoted in this reading. And is one of the things he says from the cross. In fact, so harrowing is it that many of our Bibles still haven't been the Aramaic, "Eloi Eloi Lama Sabachthani", "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus, when he's praying, calls God Father in every single prayer he prays, echoing something his mother Mary would have taught him - except at this moment, when instead of Father, he shouts "My God". It's as though he is utterly separated from God in this moment, and we believe in Christian theology that's exactly what happened. That this person who was in touch with the Father all the way through his life, in the moment of his death, is separated. And if we dig a little deeper, we'll find that our understanding of what happens on the cross of why he died, is to do with us - that he takes all the sin and all the evil and all the desolation that is our human experience, and he takes it to himself as he dies on a cross.

But here's the promise: because he is desolate and forsaken, you and I never, ever need to be. And the promise he speaks over us, is "I am with you always. Even to the end of the age." You and I need never be desolate, because he was desolate, and the reason we need never be desolate, is because the story did not end on the cross. It ended three days later, when death was defeated, and he is alive. And that resurrection life that means we need not fear death, we need not fear our own mortality, is the very reason I'm a Christian. And many of us will feel that is why we're compelled to this Jesus. How then should we live as a church that reflects that resurrection truth? That there is nothing to be feared?

Some of it might sound a bit mundane. I think we're called to be non-anxious in our leadership and in our sharing of our life. I think we're called to be bold with our generosity, our giving of ourselves to other people. I increasingly think generosity is a way of life, and it is not just about our money, although I think it is about our money and our possessions because often, those are the things we hold most closely to ourselves. But it's about our friendship, our time, how we choose to spend what we have on earth. And sometimes if we're following in the footsteps of Christ, it will be astonishing moments of self-sacrifice, and self-giving for other people.

David Williams

Bishop of Basingstoke

The logo for 'Generous June' features the word 'GENEROUS' in a small, orange, sans-serif font above the word 'june' in a larger, blue, lowercase sans-serif font. The text is enclosed within a circular graphic composed of two curved lines, one orange and one blue, that meet at the top and bottom.

Mark 15:33-41

The Greatest Gift is Death

We will never be completely like Jesus in his death and his resurrection. But he gives us by grace the status of being ransomed, healed, restored and forgiven. And he promises us an eternity, where death is truly defeated. And our challenge as Christians is dare we start to live the Kingdom of God now: heaven, on earth. Death defeated now. Whenever you and I pray the Lord's Prayer, "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We're at the cross. And we're at the entrance to an empty tomb that says he has won. Will you join with me as we seek prayerfully, to live lives as a church to reflect what glorious truth that death is defeated? Jesus is alive.

Lord, with all that we carry, with the reality of our mortality, with the things that we would fear, we pray today for a fresh glimpse of the risen Christ, the one who is Lord and King and bids us welcome to participate in his life.

Amen.

June 29th

Mark 16:1-8
The Greatest Gift is Life

When I was a child, my grandparents travelled widely, sending me postcards from all around the world. I longed to travel to these far-off places glimpsed in their photographs, but more than anywhere, I wanted to visit the Galapagos Islands. I was transfixed by the wildlife, so alien and unafraid of humans, and I was transfixed by the geography, the wild beauty of rugged volcanic islands, and the exotic location - seemingly unreachable. When my grandmother died and left me some money, I had no hesitation in using it to see the place I'd dreamed about, and it didn't disappoint - creation in all its glorious diversity and abundance! The generous inheritance made it possible.

I wonder if you've ever wished for a generous inheritance to help you fulfil a dream or help you out of a difficult place? The three women in today's passage were in a really tough place - a place of despair and anguish. They'd had such dreams for Jesus, glimpsed something of the fullness of life, the healing and hope he had apparently offered. But now he was dead; all that was left was to tend his tomb.

And then this astonishing sight, this astonishing news: an angel telling them that Jesus is alive, risen from the dead, waiting to see them again. No wonder they were seized by terror and amazement - death doesn't just release its grip, or new life appear in stone-cold tombs! But in his resurrection, Jesus defeated this last enemy and opened the way to the Kingdom of God. Through his death we become heirs of the Kingdom, heirs of the most generous inheritance imaginable.

Inheriting the Kingdom gives us the greatest gift of life. This side of death we have glimpses of the longed-for landscape of heaven, of beauty blossoming in barrenness, of despairing mourners transformed into confident evangelists and denying disciples baptising new believers in their thousands.

This inheritance also makes us heirs beyond death, of eternal life, to be in God's presence forever, in the place where there is no longer any mourning or crying or pain. He gives us the certain hope that death is not the end, that our broken world will be finally restored and healed, completely and for ever.

In his generosity, God paints a picture of that for us now, through his word and by his Spirit. It's a picture of the transfixing beauty and shalom peace of his Kingdom, that in this world, we might not despair, but have confidence in that promised destination where he has gone ahead. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!



Generous June is an initiative that seeks to engage churches, communities and individuals with generosity, by encouraging understanding and promoting activity throughout the month of June.

Thank you for journeying with us through the month of June as we reflect and focus on how we can be more generous. We'd love to know how this series may have changed or developed your thinking towards generosity.

Sharing your stories can help to build up and encourage those around you.

Please feel free to contact the team at
www.generousjune.co.uk/contact/
We'd love to hear from you.

www.generousjune.co.uk