

So here we are in week three of our series, Jesus and we. In week one, we thought about the need for a big faith. From that we said we need to be faith filled, big thinking risk takers. We must never insult God with small thinking or safe living. In week two, we thought about serving. We are not to be spiritual consumers rather, we are to be spiritual contributors, remembering that the church does not exist for us. We are the church and we exist for the world.

Today I want to talk about giving and irrational generosity. In the reading today, we were reminded that it's more blessed to give than to receive. One of the things that is very common in Scotland is a scarcity mindset. Many people have grown up with the mindset that says there's never enough to go around. It sometimes shows itself in an attitude that says, take what you can when you can, because you won't get another chance; or, it can show itself with your first question is always, "what is the cost?" Someone with an abundance mindset believes there is always more. If we take it from a faith perspective we serve an abundantly powerful God who has promised to provide for us.

Let's suppose we had an apple pie and you cut out one quarter and took it. A scarcity mindset says, "Hang on, there's not enough for me and the other people who want apple pie. If they also have apple pie I'm going to miss out." An abundance mindset says, "Have you had enough apple pie because I can always get another one?"

*2 Corinthians 8:1-7 And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. <sup>2</sup>In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. <sup>3</sup>For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, <sup>4</sup>they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. <sup>5</sup>And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. <sup>6</sup>So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. <sup>7</sup>But since you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you - see that you also excel in this grace of giving.*

Paul was trying to inspire the Corinthians to give to the church in Jerusalem. He uses the example of the Macedonians who, despite living in incredible poverty, were irrationally generous. They were extremely poor and undergoing a severe trial, yet they were overflowing with joy. Paul says they gave beyond their ability. Let's just pause there for a moment and ask ourselves when was the last time you gave as much as you were able, and maybe even pushed it beyond that? That's a fairly convicting question.

Notice that he says that it was entirely on their own, without being asked, that they were desperate to share in this service for the people of God. They didn't just ask to be involved, they pleaded. We have no idea, but I wonder if Paul said to them, "You have enough trouble of your own. Nobody expects you to do this. We'll let some wealthier congregations give."

These people urgently pleaded for the privilege of being able to give. How different that is from what we see today in the West. As a congregation we have been very fortunate in that when a specific need has arisen we have experienced some of this generosity. But lots of congregations rely on fetes, car boot sales or other gimmicks to raise money. Have a quick look at some Christian TV programmes and it's for ten dollars we'll send you prayer, and if you'd like some anointing oil straight from Israel it can be yours for only a hundred dollars.

Having exceeded everyone's expectations, Paul then explains the reason for their generosity. He says they gave themselves first to the Lord. They gave their lives to the Lord and had experienced the love and grace of God. It was because they understood that God was for them that they were able to be generous for others. So Paul says to the people in Corinth, "You've got it all: faith, wisdom and love. So make sure that you also excel in this grace of giving." I think that is a message for us - we have so much to be thankful for, but we need to learn

irrational generosity, to excel in the grace of giving. Why? Because we truly believe that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Over the last couple of weeks we've looked at the scale of 1 to 10 and in our heads have marked where before on the scale. So today, the question is about generosity are you more or less generous in character and mindset? I would suggest that none of us will be a ten - unless you gave your life for the sins of the world, and none of us will really be a one. But think about it, you might give what people would consider to be a lot of money, but for you, it's really not a lot. People could give a big amount and yet really not be that generous. And yet, on the other hand, you might be giving what some people would think is very little but for you it's a lot.

I want you to think about it. Maybe not so much in how much you give but maybe think about it in how much you keep for yourself. Fair enough? Just go through your mind maybe you're a tither and maybe you give offerings and maybe you pray about what else to give and you're strategic, maybe you have a giving budget. Maybe you give a lot of your time and you volunteer - you might be a 7 or an 8 or a 9.

You might be on the other hand one who finds it very difficult to give. You might be one right now and you're kind of angry that we're talking about this in church. Let's call it what it is. You're sensitive to the subject and you don't like it. That could be an indication of a scarcity mindset and it might tip you a little bit lower on the scale. But I want you to do is think about it. How much do you keep, how much do you really use to be a blessing to others? Where would rank yourself on the scale?

What I want to do is encourage you if you're a follower of Jesus to become irrationally generous. You don't have to be a Christian to be irrationally generous. In fact I know a lot of non-Christians who are wildly generous. You don't have to be, but if you are a Christian, I believe that you really should be irrationally generous with what God trusts to you.

Isaiah 32:8 *But generous people plan to do what is generous, and they stand firm in their generosity.*

They plan to do what is generous. Generous people plan to do what is generous. They stand firm in their generosity. They plan to do it. Stingy people plan how they can get more. A generous person does the same thing with giving. They plan how they can be more generous. They stand firm in their generosity. When all of culture says consume, consume, a generous person stands firm. No I give, give, give because giving is not just what we do but generous is who I am. Don't miss the power of that. Giving is not just something we occasionally do. Giving is a mark of our relationship with God.

A couple of years ago the Session decided that instead of doing a big stewardship drive for money and asking people to give more we would be more low key, and I would preach about giving more often during the year.

Let's be honest though we have members who, as far as we can tell, are not giving financially to the church. We understand that there are sometimes good reasons why people adjust their giving to give less, but to give nothing? That looks a lot like spiritual consumption, rather than spiritual contributing. Some people make up for the fact that they don't have much to give financially by offering time and talent instead. Of course, others give both.

When the church cooker broke, we said that if anyone wanted to make a donation it would be received gratefully. We received enough to cover the cooker and also to help with new worktops in the café. There are generous people here and it's great to see.

As we launch into the Path of Renewal process it's good to know that the central committees of the church are putting some money into the process, and I hope we will also get some financial support from Presbytery, but there is also a need for us to begin to put resources together for training, equipping and to build a fund for use when we're further along the process. The thing is it can't be instead of what we already give, it has to be in

addition. So, over the next few months I want you to think about being generous specifically with regard to the Path of renewal process. If you want to give to that please write that on the envelope or give it to Robert Gibson and let him know what your gift is for. That way we can keep it separate for that purpose.

As part of the process we're going to ask people to join a team and that will require a significant time commitment because it has to be the priority for the team.

Acts 4:32-35 <sup>32</sup>*All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.* <sup>33</sup>*With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all* <sup>34</sup>*that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales* <sup>35</sup>*and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.* This talks of the generosity of the early church because God's grace was so powerfully at work in them. His grace was at work in them all so that there was no needy persons among them. Could that be possible today? I'm here to tell you if we would allow God's grace to impact our lives we would get on fire and lead the way with irrational generosity because we truly believe it is more blessed to give than receive. I believe we could meet the needs of the people in our communities. I believe we could get their attention.

Wouldn't it be great to be part of a group of irrationally generous people who start with the tithe and then give offerings beyond that. A group of people who are not entitled but see themselves as entrusted with God, resources to do more than they believed possible. People may ask why we are being so generous and that opens up the possibility of telling them about our generous God who gave his own son, even when we didn't want to know him, so that we can have a new life and relationship with him.

As followers of Jesus, we should be irrationally generous because we serve the most generous God. Therefore, we should lead the way with irrational generosity because we truly believe that it is more blessed to give than to receive.