

**23 April 2023 All Saints Hove**

**Easter season: road to Emmaus (Luke 24.13-35)**

Presumably the disciples knew the Hebrew scriptures well and they certainly knew Jesus. But both seemed strange to them. The scriptures needed interpretation in the light of events and so disconsolate were they that they didn't recognise the risen Lord walking with them.

A doctrinally over-confident contemporary Church could learn a lot from this Gospel story.

One of my favourite paintings is Caravaggio's Supper at Emmaus. I love the way it invites us to the table and bursts into our space, one of the disciple's elbows bursting through his sleeve and the painting's canvas.

Of course, that 's the point. They recognised him in the familiar action of the breaking of bread. It is a moment of surprise. Then he's gone. They ran to tell the others. It doesn't feel permanent but it's enough for a lifelong faith.

We're left with that classic quandary of being disciples and having to look after a church. It's not just about finding Christ bursting through into our space but having to look after the building, fit in the Annual Meeting before the end of April and trying to make sure the finances add up.

The first parish where I was vicar was the Isle of Dogs in London's Docklands – the loop in the River Thames in the title sequence of East Enders. When I arrived the church's finances didn't add up and every PCC talked about money. As my father once said, "It's not surprising that poor people are materialistic as they are constantly worrying about how to put bread on the table."

So, we agreed as a church that we would talk about money twice a year: once when we asked everyone to review their giving to church and then in the reports to the Annual Meeting. Next week is All Saints' Annual Meeting and written reports are available today. We haven't had a stewardship review and are in danger of talking about money all the time because we are projecting a deficit.

The finances of All Saints are a bit bigger and more complicated than some churches but each of us ought to review our giving to church once a year and I'd ask you to do so this week in preparation for the Annual Meeting.

Four simple points:

1. It doesn't matter how poor or how wealthy you are. To be able to give is to be human. Everyone can give something and giving is good for us. It feels great to give.
2. Giving is not primarily about finance. It is about faith. If you want to know what a person believes ask them what they spend their money on. We give to church because we believe church matters. It's voluntary giving, not a tax. So it's up to you. But it's very striking at All Saints that people in the past have given generously. And legacies have been important. Those of us who own our homes are sometimes capital rich and revenue poor. A legacy gift is often of a size that most of us can't think about in our lifetime. Whilst you review your giving this week, if you haven't done so, please consider leaving a legacy to All Saints. They are transformative. My predecessor but one at St Martin-in-the-Fields said that people gave when the church was seen to be doing God's work. The churches finances were always a bit rocky but the angel of death was kind and some people from the congregation and beyond left a legacy. Over the years the finances just about added up. It was a matter of faith.
3. His successor, my immediate predecessor, thought the church had significant assets and we should steward them as best we could. He was altogether more organised and extended the ministry of the church in a commercial direction. In a time of high unemployment the business created jobs and generated a profit for the church. Actually, lots of churches do this in one way or another. Here at All Saints the parish hall earns a significant income as well as providing an important meeting place for the community. One Bread Café has the potential to make a profit as well as be a part of our ministry of welcome and hospitality and so on.

What we are learning is that there has to be significant and sustained investment to realise the potential of these commercial ministries. At SMITF it took several years for the business to make a profit. At the worst moment the church took legal advice about the implications of bankruptcy.

All Saints has taken a risk in developing new ministries with central funding from the Church of England. And I think it very likely there are more risks around the corner in relation to the development of our buildings which beyond this worship space of the church are a muddle. If they are developed they could do more and would probably raise more in terms of income. Stewarding our assets is an important part of reviewing our finances.

4. Being more business-minded doesn't let us off the hook in relation to our individual giving. There are various ways in which I have heard the Church tell its people how to work out how much to give.

10% of income: tithing. Before tax, after tax, after core household expenses or what?

I've got a very wealthy friend, an American Roman Catholic. His Church sent him on a programme to help him work out how to give. When he came back he said, "It was OK. They told me to tithe and I said I already do that but they didn't understand me because I keep the 10% for family give away 90%."

Someone else I know told me recently, "No one needs more than £20 million to live on." He has given away over £200 million in the last 12 years.

We're all different and our circumstances differ.

So I don't think it helps much for me to say you ought to give 10% or 1% or whatever. We all ought to give in proportion to our resources. The story of the widow's mite is of a small gift costing more for her to make than a wealthy person's big gift.

You can see the figures in the annual accounts and you know roughly the number of people who come to church and the other sources of income.

Energy costs have risen dramatically and the church is doing more work with a whole variety of groups.

If you want a conversation to help you work out your giving I am sure that any of the PCC or one of the clergy would be willing to help you think it through.

The only principle that makes sense to me is to give generously and give a bit more than you think you can afford.

Back on the Isle of Dogs one of the Churchwardens said we can't sustain this with the number of people who come to church regularly. That's probably true here as well but when that's a financial problem it grinds you down. When it's about life and faith, ministry and mission, it's got a different energy about it and Christ bursts into our space as we recognise him in the breaking of the bread and we want to run and tell the others what we have seen.

Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!