

**Call to Worship**

As we begin our worship these words are for our thinking this morning: “The Lord is my light and my salvation: I will fear no-one. The Lord protects me from all danger: I will never be afraid. I have asked the Lord for one thing: to live in the house of the Lord all my life, to marvel there at his goodness, and to ask for his guidance.”

**Hymn CH4 110 – Glory be to God the Father,**

**Prayer of Adoration & Praise**

We clear our heads, we still our hearts and we come before God in prayer, let us pray.

Gracious God, our Loving Heavenly Father, we praise you this morning for your majesty, your power, your glory and your authority. Once again, we declare that there is no God like you and there is no God besides you.

We praise you for your mercy, your gracious care for all your creation; for your work in creation and that you have called us to see all our work as art of our working with you for the good of others and the care of your world.

Father, we praise you this morning and every morning for the work of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, for his life of service to others, and his obedience to your will. We praise you for his work of teaching others about your kingdom and his work of healing as a demonstration that the kingdom had come.

Gracious God, we praise you for Jesus’ work on the cross and that through his death and resurrection, he has opened the way for all people to enter your kingdom.

Lord, your name is all goodness, your nature is all loving-kindness, and your purpose is peace. We come and confess that we are not the people you intended us to be. Neither are we the people we would like others to think we

are. There are things we have said, done or thought that we would rather no one else knew about. We are ashamed.

Father, we look at your world, which is spoilt by greed, tainted by selfishness, and stained by injustice. But the world has been made that way by our greed, our selfishness, and our unjust dealings. Lord we come to not to ask for forgiveness alone, but for cleansing and renewal. Help us to reflect your mercy and become channels of your forgiveness and your grace.

Gracious God, we praise you for the gifts and the skills that you have placed in our lives and for every opportunity to use those gifts for the good of others and for the glory of your holy name. We praise you that we can use them to earn our living and as a free gift-offering of love to you and to our neighbour and to our parish.

We praise you for the Holy Spirit, who is at work in our hearts and lives. May all he does to change and renew us enable us to answer your call on our lives and serve you all our days.

For all this we ask in Jesus' name, who taught us when we pray together to say; Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others that sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

**Reading:** 2 Corinthians 8: 1 - 9

### **Christian Giving**

<sup>1</sup>Our brothers and sisters, we want you to know what God's grace has accomplished in the churches in Macedonia. <sup>2</sup>They have been severely tested by the troubles they went through; but their joy was so great that they were extremely generous in their giving, even though they are very poor. <sup>3</sup>I can assure you that they gave as much as they could, and even more than they could. Of their own free will <sup>4</sup>they begged us and pleaded for the privilege of having a part

in helping God's people in Judea. <sup>5</sup>It was more than we could have hoped for! First they gave themselves to the Lord; and then, by God's will they gave themselves to us as well. <sup>6</sup>So we urged Titus, who began this work, to continue it and help you complete this special service of love. <sup>7</sup>You are so rich in all you have: in faith, speech, and knowledge, in your eagerness to help and in your love for us. And so we want you to be generous also in this service of love.

<sup>8</sup>I am not laying down any rules. But by showing how eager others are to help, I am trying to find out how real your own love is. <sup>9</sup>You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; rich as he was, he made himself poor for your sake, in order to make you rich by means of his poverty.

## **All Age Talk**

### **Hymn CH4 523 – Hands to work and feet to run,**

#### **Sermon – ‘The Gift of Grace’**

During the rest of this month, here at Eastwood, we are going to take time to think about how we share what we have, with a focus on how we share what we have with the Church. This will culminate on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October when we take part in the Church of Scotland’s National Giving Day Initiative. So, today we begin a short study of the Apostle Paul’s second letter to the Corinthian Church as he focuses on the subject of “giving”.

Now when it comes to collecting money, be it for Christian Aid, The Lodging House Mission, or any other charity, it never seems to be an easy task. For Paul had already written to the Church at Corinth, asking for a collection for the Jerusalem Church, and now in today’s Scripture reading he is writing to the Corinthians again, firstly to offer his thanks for their response but also to make it clear that the money given is not enough. Paul wants more!

If you have read any of Paul’s Letters, in the New Testament, you will know that he has a wonderful way of approaching different subjects. Here he is concentrating on the need for Christians to give and not the need of the Church in Jerusalem to receive – even though they were in dire straits. Paul very clearly

defines the act of giving as an act of Grace, that both reflects and participates in God's incredible and overwhelming generosity to us.

Furthermore, Paul uses the example of the poor, but generous, Macedonians to spur the Corinthians on. He does it not by writing about how much they gave, but by writing about *how* they gave. If you look at the twenty-first century Church of Scotland, you could argue that these 'Biblical Macedonians' are still with us in spirit. They are the people who have the least but often demonstrate God's generosity for more than those who may be described as 'well off'.

This is a different way to think about money and it certainly not the way our modern society thinks about money. So, if we are to achieve what Paul strives for in his letter, we must encourage some Biblical thinking. For, how we all handle our money is primarily about discipleship. If this was true for Paul, all those years ago, then it is manifestly more transparent now.

In the western world, our attitude towards money could be compared to trying to drink seawater. We will never be able to satisfy our thirst, no matter how much we drink, for it will poison us. We will never have enough to buy everything we want, whilst protecting our lifestyles and doing all we want. As our income grows so do our aspirations, and in turn, that will 'shrink' the available space for grace and generosity.

Paul also urges his readers, in verse 7 to '*be generous also in this service of love*' and that is what the Church of Scotland hopes to achieve with its National Giving Day Initiative. Yet, if we are going to be 'generous' then we must be willing to acknowledge God's gift of Grace to us. The Macedonians cannot give enough!

For nothing is really "too much" for those who really love God. For the Macedonians, giving is an act of Grace, an act of love, an act of thanksgiving, and last, but by no means least, a joyful privilege. Paul sees their generosity as the result of God's Grace in their lives. Where God's Grace is truly experienced then the evidence will be a similar love and generosity – but it will not be easy as there will always be issues and testing along the way. The question for us is this

– are we channels where God’s love and generosity can flow or are like ‘bottle stoppers’, preventing God’s love and generosity flowing freely?

As I read our Scripture reading over and over, three words came to mind for me, and I want to share them with you this morning. This first of these words is ‘privilege’. The Macedonians believed it was important that they were able to contribute, they wanted to share in the ministry of the Jerusalem Church and considered it a privilege to do so.

The second word is ‘sharing’. The Macedonians saw themselves as participating in a wider Church. At Eastwood, we contribute in full to the Ministries and Mission fund, held at the National Offices, but our participation in the National Giving Day, will allow us to keep money raised on that day to use exclusively for the work and witness of us here in Eastwood. When you think about, there might never have been any clergy or mission and outreach work done, at any time, if Paul had not begun taking collections.

The last of my three words is ‘generous’. For it is through your generous giving through standing orders, Freewill Offering Envelopes, or in the plate that all of us who belong to Eastwood ensure that our ‘collective ministry’ continues. For Ministry is not the sole responsibility of the Minister. Without tempting fate here, most of what I do for the Church, the members could do on their own without me – but remember I did say ‘most’! If you are an Elder, a pastoral visitor, Sunday School Teacher, badminton, or carpet bowls fanatic; your giving ensures that the Church can operate and the ministry which is centuries old can continue.

And yet, sometimes, we can become a little complacent about our giving to the point where it almost becomes mechanical. We can sometimes forget what a privilege and what an opportunity it is to be able to respond to God’s overwhelming generosity and gift of Grace by sharing in those gifts through our weekly giving.

For if generosity is measured by how much we have left after our giving, then few of us are “really” generous. By that measure the poorest will, more often

than not, be the most generous, especially if we give proportionately. The challenge to us is to reflect on and review our giving, not based on what we currently give, or what the Church needs, but in the light of God's Grace and generosity to us.

For God never stops giving to us and we should pray for the grace of giving to extend to our ministry, to support our Church and those in need and help us grow even more into the likeness of God. We should all think carefully and prayerfully about what we give to the Church.

However, I do not want you to go home, or exit the live stream, or catch-up video and think that I have said you must give absolutely everything you have to the Church. For getting the money right is no easy issue – debt, spending, sharing, and saving are all important issues and require a proper perspective.

The Bible has a lot to say about money and people are always surprised to learn that Jesus spoke often about money and possessions. If you can give a little, a lot or nothing at all, the Church of Scotland and I are always grateful for all you bring and contribute, in different ways, to our life here in Eastwood.

So, as we travel on through this October, we have an opportunity to consider the 'ministry' of our Church and how it can bear fruit, within our Church family, and community, through our giving and then we are invited to make our response on Sunday 31 October, our National Giving Day.

Yet, more than that, I hope we will see changes in ourselves and strengthening in our relationships with one another. The Gift of Grace helps transform us into being more content, more joyful, and more trusting in God and with each other, so that we Scottish Presbyterians may begin to feel a little bit more like 'Biblical Macedonians.'

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Hymn CH4 374 – From heaven you came, helpless babe**

## **Prayer for Ourselves and Others**

We unite our hearts again in prayer, let us pray.

Lord, you freely give us all that we need, you shower us with blessings, thank you. Today we offer our gifts of money; may they be a blessing in whatever way they are used.

We also offer ourselves, all of our gifts that are given by you, please take us and use us as you will.

Eternal God, we give You thanks for the splendour and wonder of Your creation with its multitude of stars, its diversity and difference, for the fecundity through randomness and design, for the evolution of consciousness in a material universe.

Above all, we praise You for Your Spirit within all things, uniquely, mysteriously, in Jesus of Nazareth, one with You, for the light He brought, the love He shared, the hospitality He showed. We give You thanks for His followers of every generation: apostles, theologians, mystics, reformers and the faithful of every century and culture.

Holy, mysterious God, bless Your Church with new confidence: deepen our love of Christ, our attentiveness to His Presence, our living of the Mystery. In the face of hostile challenge, through argument and action, may we never fail to give an account of ourselves. We hold up before You, O God, those who are persecuted for their faith, and those in exile, driven from their home and country. Through prayer public and private, the ritual of sacrament, the sacredness of silence and the adventure of pilgrimage, resource, reshape and reinvigorate us.

In a world of much suffering, in all its brutality, we pray for peacemakers, for the gifts of dialogue and mediation, for respect between enemies, each of us bearers of Your image.

We pray for our country and community, for children growing up in poverty, for parents unable to cope.

We remember those living in loneliness, those suffering from depression or mental breakdown; we remember those who are sick in hospital or at home, those who are dying, and those who are bereaved.

At one with You, we are one with the saints; all are alive in You. We call to mind those whom we love but who now are in Your nearer Presence. Assure us that You hold them in Your eternal love; May they inspire and shape us as ever they did. In Jesus Name, we pray. Amen.

**Hymn CH4 468 – Son of God, eternal Saviour,**

**Benediction**

God has shared His Gift of Grace with us. Now may we share what we have received with others. So, as we go now, may the Blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Spirit rest upon you and all whom you love this day and always. Amen.