

## Gifts and Talents Thank you - 2nd Feb 2024

Luke 2:22-40.

Its the thought that counts...

As I hand over a last minute gift, bought from the all night garage on xmas eve, a crumpled card that I haven't even written in.

I'm covering my embarrassment - I wish it was the thought that counted - but clearly I've shown that I didn't put thought into it!

But what it points to is the connection - its not just the gift, the thing we do or say, It is to do with the thought that's behind it, that goes into it.

The intention.

This is a thank you service - thank you to all those who do things for St James and the community.

I don't think of the jobs you do as particularly church jobs - we mow teh churchyard for everyone's benefit, - delivering magazines, helping in teh coffee shop, doing readings..

All these jobs , I could call them jobs, the things you do - are like gifts you give to the church , the community.

I wnat to think of them not as jobs, but gifts.

Jobs sounds like chores, it sounds like it doesn't matter who does it, as long as it gets done.

And that is not what's going on here.

You are giving your time, your energy, your strength, your skill, your cheerfulness, your attention

Even your love -

With the flowers, teh coffee shop, Recreate ..

So what you offer comes not just with 'the job that is done', yes teh reading got read, the church got cleaned - but it comes with you.

Thats the thing about gifts. The gift, plus the feeling, plus part of us.

These gifts make a connection between teh giver and the receiver

When you give a gift there's a connection made

Beuase the thing about gifts (jobs) is that they are to someone, or for someone

They have to be received

In my first church I once thanked the flower arranger and they said - in 30 years that the first time anyone's ever thanked me!

I acknowledge her gift, I valued her gift,

She would carry on doing that job

She would carry on offering that gift

But it wasn't being received - they were piling up somewhere.

That's why I'm so keen to come round to different groups and say thank you for all you do.

Me, as representative of the church or the community - I know you're not doing it for me to say - we receive your gift

And we value it. The community values it. Its important, its worth something, its valuable, its precious.

That was what was going on in the temple - in our reading, when Mary and Joseph take Jesus for his right of purification. Good job they were nearby in Bethlehem - just a few miles outside Jerusalem.

By going to the temple and thanking God -  
they are turning this baby into a gift  
They are saying - this baby is not ours by right, or duty, or a mistake  
This baby is a gift from God

(They buy in back - they admit it belongs to god  
And say - its so precious - but that's another thing)

So the baby is transformed - made even more special - by saying - it comes from God.  
So we see that the weight of the gift, the value, the worth, is not to do with money or usefulness, or beauty, - the value comes from who it is attached to...

Teh letter from a loved one,  
The heirloom that carries the weight of the family.  
The kings fountain pen  
The hour of a busy person's time

These transform the gift - its no longer just what it is - the ring of gold metal,  
Or a cup of coffee, or a magazine in a letter box...  
It is a symbol of love, a connection, something precious.

and teh weight of it, can change the giver too.  
To give away part of yourself.. has an effect.

So - when something comes attached to God -  
It has the greatest possible value

It transforms the offering  
During communion - oh well, communion is also transformed -  
we're going to sing the hymn by George Herbert - teach me my god adn king,  
I was George Herbert's successor as priest in Bemerton - he was the 23rd rector, I was the 46th!

And he wrote this amazing hymn - which is about how god transforms all we do,  
If we let him.  
If we change our attitude, or have teh right mindset.

One of the verses says - whoever sweep a room 'as for thy sake' -  
Changes it to worship.

You can look at the window, or you can look through it.  
You can think of gift you give, or you can think of the giver  
You can look at the coffee you serve in teh cafe, or you can be serving Jesus himself.

(In giving , we can receive such blessing)

George Herbert says, and I agree -  
All can be transformed to Gold.  
When it is offered to God -  
All work can be hallowed, made holy  
The co-op checkout staff, or Amazon delivery driver, or the vicar or the archbishop - all  
doing holy jobs  
If offered to God.

Yes, the work you do - Serving others, offering part of your very self, to others  
Is amazing and thank you.

But also it can be offered to God -  
It is changed - switched - alchemy

So I want to take alt he gifts, the talents, the time, the effort, the cold days, the hard days  
As well as the joyful ones  
And offer it to god.

Bring the divine into this...  
So it will be changed, charged, full of his glory

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

Thank you - people of Alderholt, St James, for all you do  
May it be transformed by God into gold  
And may you be transformed by his love.