

Harvest is a time to celebrate and give thanks to God for all that he has provided. In a different time or a different culture, it would be a time of celebration where life has been secured for the coming year, but we have mostly been able to move away from this in our modern world. And yet it is worth remembering that we are the lucky ones and there are others even today for whom each harvest does indeed still directly produce their annual food requirement and if the harvest failed, they would be hungry.

For most of us here though, this is a faded memory of an imagined culture rather than a real-life experience. So harvest, for us, perhaps becomes partly a thanksgiving to God for the huge amount we have received, and also a challenge to serve God from that abundance. And it is easy to read the passage from 2 Corinthians from this stand-point.

God loves a cheerful giver. The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. Having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity. And so on. I'm not planning on preaching about the need for giving generously from our relative wealth, even if we don't feel flush with cash because this should be fairly obvious from the passage. We have mission partners who we seek to support, especially at harvest, but also throughout the year; we have abundance, and they don't.

However, I was struck by a little phrase in verse 12. In the pew bible it is translated "for the rendering of this ministry". In the Greek, it is "diakonia tAs leitourgias". The diakonia is the "mission" – in this passage it's the mission to collect money for the poverty-stricken Christians in Jerusalem and the leitourgias is the "service", the act of rendering the mission for these others. Aside from a little Greek lesson, why am I bothering with this you may ask?

I think that it gives us a little window through which to rethink our acts of generosity towards God's work in Menston, the Diocese further afield and also towards other people and other charitable causes. Perhaps my point will become clear if I tell you that the Greek "leitourgias" is the word from which we get "liturgy". Liturgy is a form of public worship of God – it's the standard words in our service books this morning. And these words help us to meet up and worship God together. Back in the New Testament times, it was how public meetings were held – they ran according to a "liturgy", a bit like our meetings today tend to run to an agenda. So for Christians, a liturgy is the form of how we meet together to worship God.

So what's my point you might well ask? Well, this means that for Paul, writing to the church in a place called Corinth, giving was part of their worship of God. That's why in verse 13 the testing of this ministry gives Glory to God. It also produces thanks and prayer from those it assists, but for Paul, this giving isn't an add-on, but is in fact a key part of the "rules" of public worship of God, if you like. It is embedded in the form of worship and so worshipping God wouldn't be complete without it.

This means that we are going way beyond the normal, "you have lots, therefore give to those in need" principle, or even beyond the "Christians are meant to love other people so we should give to other people" principle, or EVEN beyond the "God has given you lots and therefore you should share that abundance with others" principle. Paul is saying that if we aren't giving, we aren't fully worshipping! Worship of God, who created all the world, those who have much and those who have

little, requires that we give. It requires that we partner with God in looking after his creation. It is not worship without us mirroring God 's self-giving for us by giving of ourselves to others.

And the amazing thing is that once we are worshipping God using the form of giving, God uses it to multiply benefits. We bring glory to God, others bring thanks to God and prayers for us even as we pray for them, and through it all God is magnified in everyone's eyes.

I thought we'd illustrate this with some balloons. We're going to worship God together by drawing or writing something we are thankful to God for on our balloon. And since these are helium balloons, our prayers can rise up to God. So please can you check under your seats...

Only on one side of the church – suggest sharing with those who don't have any...

Great, now if you could just get some helium... what do you mean you don't have any?

Who has the helium? Can you share it please?

Let's fill up and draw our thanks and tie balloons to altar rail.

Now – can you see what's happened? We've all worshipped God and thanked him. We've shared, and we are thankful to each other for sharing.

This is why Paul finishes with "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" It's that through proper forms of worship of God, he has multiplied all the benefits of this worship. Every party has gained and somehow we have therefore all been recipients of this indescribable gift of a little explosion of benefits from one act of giving done in a right heart as an act of worship to God. The gift is fairly indescribable, but we all know it when we see it – how God can use what we offer to him and bring about a change in circumstances, a change in us, and a change in how we relate to others and to God, all at the same time. The world is changed, simply because of a small act of worship.

Thanks be to God. Who ever knew that giving could be so exciting! Amen.