

Dear Friends,

During the month of March we will continue our journey through Lent, ending the month with Palm Sunday, Holy Week and, of course, Easter Day, when we celebrate the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Alleluia!

People often give things up for Lent like chocolate or wine or beer! But sometimes this 'giving up' is not for the right reasons!! I'll say no more on that!

As a Church, here at St Stephen's, we will have been looking at giving. It's part of our Diocesan 'Rule of Life', called to Read, Learn and Pray and sent to Tell, Serve and Give. We will have looked at generosity and what it truly means to give.

In Lent, our goal is to be intentional about the spiritual disciplines of: prayer and scripture, self-reflection and self-discipline and a commitment to shared worship and shared life. The practice of generosity is among those core spiritual disciplines.

Generosity is not only about what we do, but also about who we are. We should try to be generous disciples in all aspects of our living and giving. Generous discipleship does not pretend that generosity is easy, in fact, no spiritual discipline is easy. We don't pretend that there isn't a 'cost of living crisis', because there is, and it is a very real, ongoing challenge to individuals as well as organisations including the church here.

Jesus encouraged his disciples not to worry and told them to give generously. You can read about this in +Luke 12:22-34.

When we think of our Father God, a loving generous God, and His Son, Jesus Christ, we see selfless giving. God gave us his Son. Jesus gave himself to die on the cross for us, to pay for our sin and our wrongs and to provide a way to life in eternity. Death is defeated. Such love. Such generosity.

Even on the cross, Jesus prayed, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"*. Such love. Such generosity.

Jesus said to the criminal on the cross at his side, *"Today you will be with me in paradise"*. Such love. Such generosity.

Can I, this Lent, encourage you to think about selfless, generous living and giving. Not just the giving of money, as important as that is, but the giving of time, of help, of small tokens of thoughtfulness, of love and of care?

When we truly reflect on our loving and generous God and His Son Jesus, whose compassion, mercy and grace are beyond what we could really

expect, please can we pray and ask ourselves the question, *"I want to help more. Am I living and giving enough. Am I?"*

Thank you to everyone who gives to St Stephen's in so many ways.

God Bless,

Keith

