

St Peter's Mount Park Road, Ealing
Sunday 8th February 2015
Stewardship Programme 2015 launch

Gifts of God for the people of God.

We like receiving gifts. Christmas, birthday and especially surprise gifts. They signify someone's love for us or their appreciation of something we have done or said that has been helpful or kind. Gifts in this way become expressions of something deeper or more important than the item itself. How we react is important too. It is important to say thank you, to be appreciative of the gift we have been given; even if sometimes we are not quite sure what it is.

As Christians one of the things we should talk about are the gifts of God. God promises in scripture to give us gifts. In the letter to the Ephesians Paul writes of the spiritual gifts; prophecy, leadership, teaching, service. God gives us gifts not just to make us happy but to further the good news of the kingdom.

There is a gift we are all given that makes everything a gift. I wonder if you can think what that might be? In our passage from the letter to the Colossians Paul is writing about that greatest gift to us from God. That gift is Jesus Christ. Jesus who was with God before the creation of all things. Paul tells us that through this great gift all things have their being and are blessed by the spirit. And the greatest thing about the gift of Jesus is that he came into the world as one of us; Jesus came as flesh and blood, bone and sinew that we might know God. Paul describes him as the image of the invisible God; Paul tells us that everything is created in Jesus and all things come from Jesus. That is most powerful; that all things come from God. And what comes from God now is reconciliation, forgiveness and a reuniting with God.

If we are in any uncertainty of this truth; if we have any questions about this then St John in his Gospel attempts to be clear and dispelling of any doubt. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.' This intimate connection between Jesus who is the Word and God is brought to us as the ultimate gift of faith and truth. It is a gift because Jesus is also described as a light. Not just any light either, this light shines outwardly to dispel darkness in the world and inwardly to dispel darkness in us. This love of God, through whom all things are made, brings light and healing to us.

This becomes clear when we realise we are created through Jesus. We are part of that creation Paul and John speak about. These passages are about us and our relationship to God, how God gives us the gift of Jesus and through Jesus the gift of his place in our life. This then opens to us a new relationship and special place in God; now we can be called children of God. Those of you who are parents can begin to understand how deep and meaningful that relationship can be; to be children of God is quite a profound status in life.

So we have said everything is created through Jesus and is then blessed by him. Everything comes from God. Thinking then in that way we should be able to make a huge list of the things we can see are gifts from God in our own life.

We see the world differently, understanding these things are from God; not from ourselves, not from others although they may be received through others, but are from God.

If they are from God we should use them wisely and with some care. This is called stewardship. A good steward cares for those things that have been placed in their care. They are not just something to be used and thrown away. Gifts from God are given so that we may play our part in building up the Kingdom of God.

This we do by using the gifts of God wisely and properly; by not wasting them; by make sure they are used as intended. One way of doing this is to be aware of these gifts and think about how we might use them and where; might be at home, in school at the office, at our luncheon club, amongst friends and with family. What we should also do is dedicate these gifts to God in a positive and creative way.

To help we launch today our Stewardship Programme 2015. There will be a lot of information about giving finically to the work of God at St Peter's. And this is right and proper as money is a gift from God and one through which we can build up his Kingdom. It is a shame we have to speak of money, that we don't have sufficient to support and encourage the ministry of God in the church. That is just the way of the world I suppose. So we have to ask all members to consider increasing their regular giving, to make it effective and efficient. But we should also take time to think about the many other gifts we have that the church needs to proclaim the good news of Jesus. To continue the work of people like Pauls and John; to reflect on whether we are leaders, or preachers, or prophets, as well as children's workers, flower arrangers, servers and readers.

This year's stewardship programme we will ask you to think about giving more financially to the life of the parish, after all we do need to pay for things and people (like your vicar). But the Stewardship Team also hopes you will think about your many other gifts from God that could be used to build up the ministry of God in this parish as well as perhaps in the wider church. Who knows, the gift God has given you is to be a priest, to be a leader, to help proclaim the good news of Jesus to others who can become the children of God.