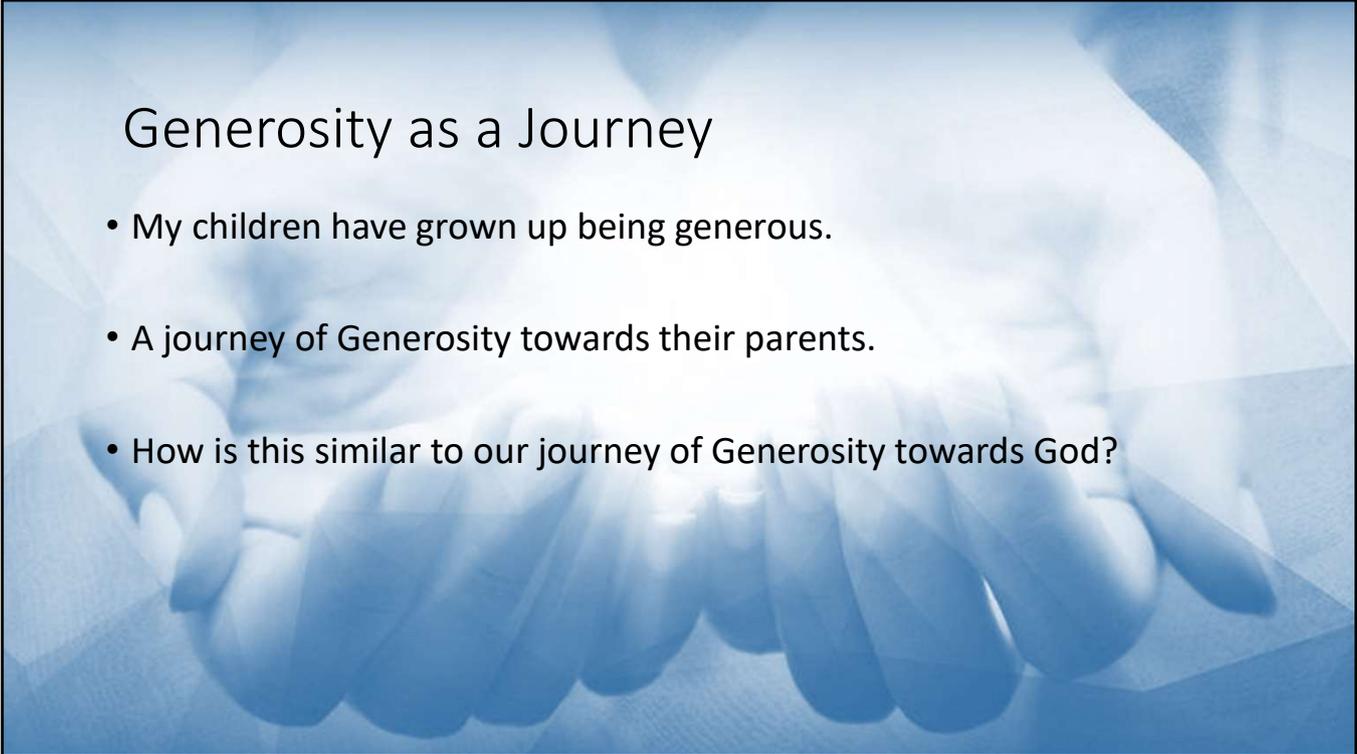


Preaching on generosity and thankfulness

Revd Trevor Marshall
Revd Ian Bullock



Generosity as a Journey

- My children have grown up being generous.
- A journey of Generosity towards their parents.
- How is this similar to our journey of Generosity towards God?

Family presents.

When I was a father of young children, I used to get birthday and Christmas presents from them. They were always exactly what I wanted. Mainly because I chose them and paid for them. I was generous to myself. There was no input on their part and certainly no sacrifice of time, money or effort.

As my children got older, I started to get presents that were beautifully handcrafted (or so they thought). But they were made with love (and a lot of guidance from my wife). When they reached the age that they had their own money, small gifts were forthcoming that they had chosen themselves. Generally, not of great value or what I would have chosen myself, but given in love.

Then there was the odd stage of getting exactly what I wanted, but chosen by myself or my wife. Given with love, but as a sense of duty.

Finally, now they are both working, I have presents from them that are thoughtful, generally something that I didn't know I wanted and certainly given with love.

All of the gifts that I have been given were given in love in response to my love to them.

And so it is with our generosity is response to God's love for us. At first, we give nothing back. What is given maybe thanks by others in response to us knowing God's love, but it is a gift given on our behalf. The next stage is when we thank God for the wonderful love that He has shown us, but does not involve any sacrifice on our part. We then move on to giving in response to God's love, but only what we are told to give. Finally, we move to a place where our response to God's love is to give generously, with sacrifice and thought. And it is then that we are truly generous in response to God's love for us.

Generosity in your context

- When was the last time a sermon on Generosity was preached?
- What is your aim now?
- Do you understand the Needs of your parish?
- Set attainable goals (agree them with the PCC)
- Being generous is missional
 - It's not just about money, that alone won't solve your problems
- Building / Enhancing an ethos of generosity
- What are your current barriers that prevent you from growing and flourishing?

* Trevor has set the scene for us to begin to think about how we look at Generosity and how through life the appreciation that we have for what we have been given changes and develops.

What I'm going to focus on is a set of tools to help you to think about how you begin to build a sermon about generosity, because trying to give you a one size fits all approach to the topic will not help you to achieve what you are trying to do. I'm going to frame this from a parish perspective, but I would also like to say that this can also work in a Benefice configuration

* The first place to start is by asking when was the last time that a sermon on generosity was preached in your church? The answer to this will either be never, and to be honest for many this is likely the case. The other answer will be a length of time ago. If this is the case, then it would be worth taking some time to look back and to ask what was the result, the response from the church to what was said. Did it illicit more action, was it a general sermon, focussed just on one specific aspect or project, or did it fall on deaf ears?

Taking time at this point to reflect on that sermon and learn from the positive and negatives will reap rewards as you start the process again.

* The next thing to do is think about what you are hoping to achieve from this sermon. Are you looking at

a specific initiative, is it a more general sermon to help people to think about the subject, or is it something else?

But before you begin, there is a question you need to ask yourself, and whilst this may feel like a grandmother sucking eggs comment, there is a lot of value in stopping to make sure you can answer this question:

* Do you understand the Needs of your parish? This is not the same as what your parish wants, that a very different conversation, and can lead to a distorted message where people are unclear as to what is being talked about.

* It is also good practice to engage your PCC in this preparation at an early stage, they have a responsibility as trustees of the parish to ensure that they are working alongside and supporting the clergy in the governance of the parish.

* Generosity is or should be at the heart of our Christian witness, its missional – we recall the generous and life-giving sacrifices that God made for us to bring us into relationship with him, and as we are taught to be imitators of Christ, then it follows that we should also look to how we demonstrate generosity.

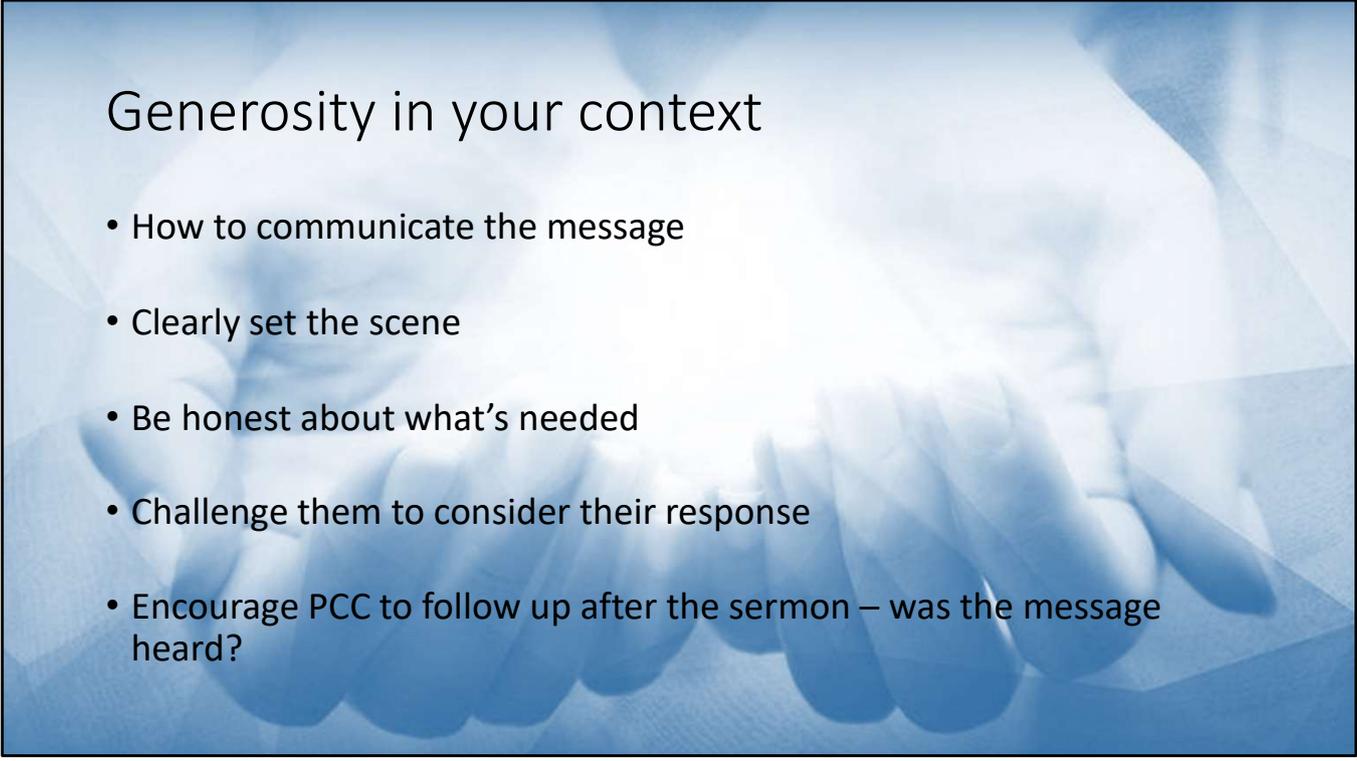
* This also brings us to an often-seen misconception. Generosity isn't just about money, because let's face it money alone won't solve your problems. When we think about generosity, we need to also remember that our time and talents are also incredibly important

One example of this could be that you have someone in your parish who doesn't have much money, but they have time and talents which could be employed in the church.

Through tackling the prospective elephant in the room, by breaking down and dispelling the myth that generosity is just that we're looking to get your money, it immediately, takes you beyond what people will likely be expecting, and enables the beginning of new conversations to release unrealised potential.

It's also important to remember that the more missional we become, through people getting involved, allows us to focus on how we look to encouraging those on the periphery, or even the outside of the church to begin to engage with us. Then it also gives the potential for other time talent and treasure to be discovered in the church, just please when you get someone new, don't ask them to go on PCC as you talk to them over coffee!

* These elements together help a Parish to build, or if this is already in place to continue to enhance an ethos of generosity throughout the church. *This also in time helps us to recognise the barriers you are facing.



Generosity in your context

- How to communicate the message
- Clearly set the scene
- Be honest about what's needed
- Challenge them to consider their response
- Encourage PCC to follow up after the sermon – was the message heard?

* So far we have looked at ways of considering generosity, and there is another element that holds this together. Earlier we considered how you identify the needs, and what are the goals required to achieve them. While you and the PCC are likely very aware of the challenges, it does not immediately follow that those sat in church will.

* This means that inside the sermon you need to also set the scene, * tell the church what is needed, what deficits are there, how can you tackle them. * Giving clear information of what is required and how it opens the way for opportunities to be acted upon. You may need to think about how you will get people past the stage of being worried about stepping up, a good way is through positive encouragement to get them to give it a go. * You may also want to encourage your PCC's to talk to people after the sermon, get them to discuss what's been said, so that the church understands what's being asked.

Generosity in your context

- Our Treasure – Money
- Have Courage!
- Speak from the heart
- Have information to share
 - Average Weekly Giving
 - Average Amount Given
 - % Using Gift Aid (Free money for the church!)
- Challenge – when did you last review your giving?

**Final Points – This takes time, be persistent keep it front and centre
'Generosity is an act of love and a response to love'**

* Some of you may be wondering how this would go hand in hand with talking about the third aspect of generosity, our treasure, money.

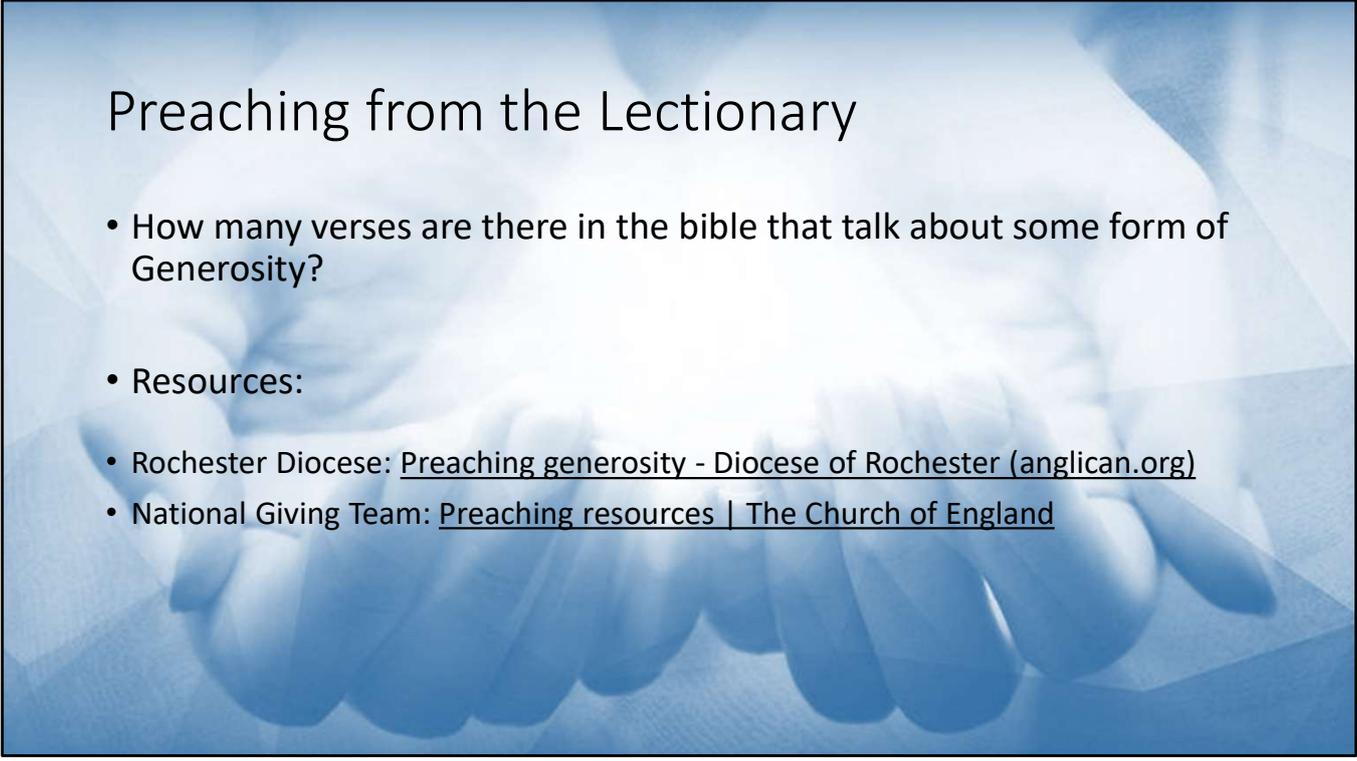
In the current climate, we all face challenges in doing this, rising costs, hikes in energy prices, purse strings being pinched all the time, the easy answer to this would be to avoid it completely, but as we heard earlier large percentages of churchgoers don't make a donation, and many haven't ever heard a sermon on giving.

* I won't lie, this takes courage, I remember the first time I preached on it, I felt as nervous as I did the very first time, I preached a sermon! But I knew it had to be done, and it had to come from the heart. * Be genuine, tell them why it's important, * get your treasurer and gift aid officers to give you some information, such as * * what is our average weekly giving, how is that broken down, what is the average amount given, how many have agreed for Gift Aid to be claimed against their gift. * Also ask them to consider the last time they reviewed how much they give on a regular basis.

I can tell you that the response given increased giving across my three churches by over £5,000, when you factored in the Gift Aid, that figure was more like £6,000. A follow up a year later was going to happen, sadly COVID got in the way, and it didn't happen until earlier this year, and again enabling people to think about their giving saw another increase, this one was approx. £2500.

But I didn't just ask them about money, I also encouraged them to think about their time and talents. That response was more difficult to quantify, but slowly things are starting to change, and through responses, it has also allowed us to begin work on our missional outreach.

* These things take time, and you do at times have to be like a dog with a bone, and keep the subject front and centre, but with prayer and grace and lots of support especially from your PCC's then things will change. *It is also important to remember that Generosity is notly an act of love, but also a response to the love we've received



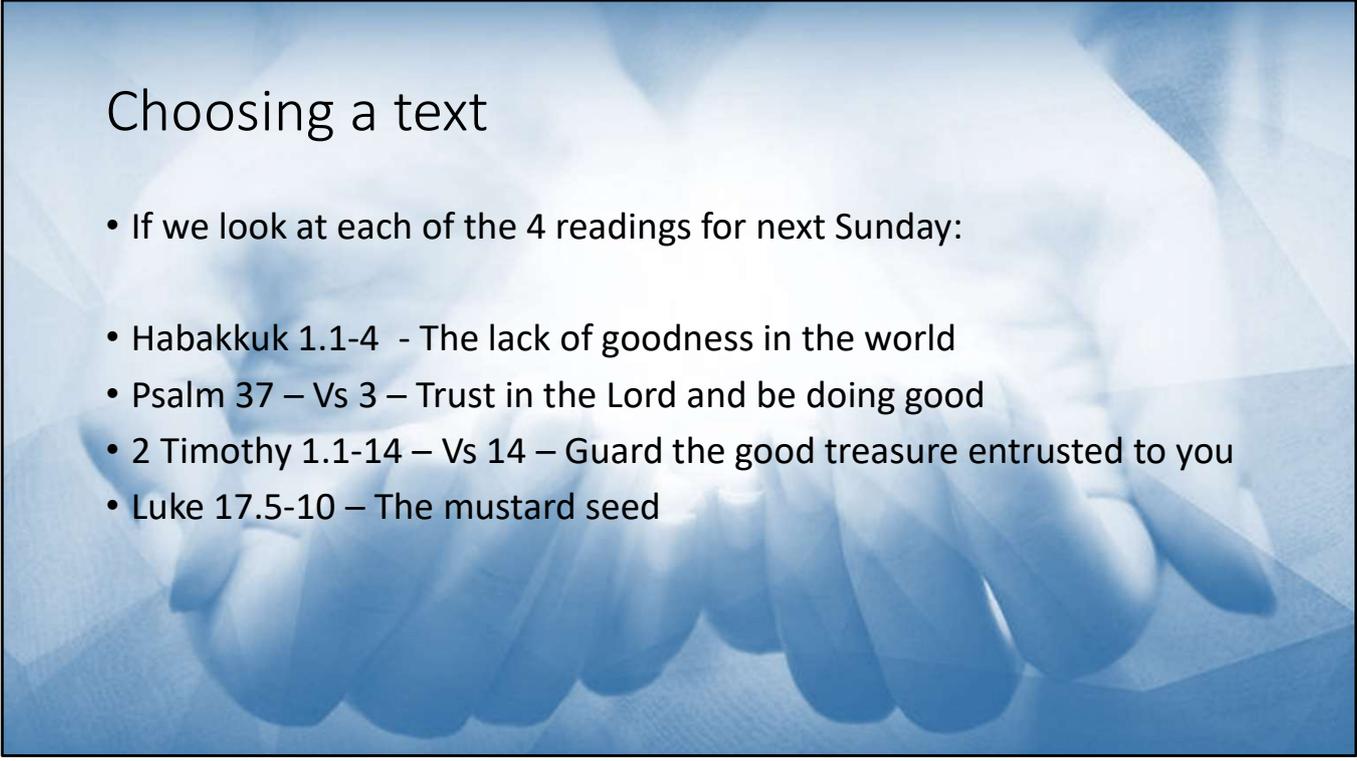
Preaching from the Lectionary

- How many verses are there in the bible that talk about some form of Generosity?
- Resources:
 - Rochester Diocese: [Preaching generosity - Diocese of Rochester \(anglican.org\)](http://anglican.org)
 - National Giving Team: [Preaching resources | The Church of England](#)

Choosing from the lectionary

Over 2450. (out of 31,000) 8%

One of the difficulties in preaching on generosity is finding the right material. There is the safe option of going for the favourite passage from scripture, but that can mean preaching the same sermon time and time again. Instead, let's look at the bible afresh each week and see if there is something that can inspire us to preach anew. There is an exercise in the Diocese of Rochester where contributors are asked to take one of the 4 possible lectionary readings for the week and find something to write a sermon starter on that relates to generosity. The first contributor looking at the 4 weeks that were allocated to them decided that they would write on the Old Testament reading for the first week, the Psalm for the second week, the Epistle for the third week and the Gospel reading for the fourth week. And although I say it myself, it was a great success! There is nearly always something in a reading that talks to us about generosity and thankfulness. It may need a bit of thought, but that is a good exercise for any sermon.



Choosing a text

- If we look at each of the 4 readings for next Sunday:
 - Habakkuk 1.1-4 - The lack of goodness in the world
 - Psalm 37 – Vs 3 – Trust in the Lord and be doing good
 - 2 Timothy 1.1-14 – Vs 14 – Guard the good treasure entrusted to you
 - Luke 17.5-10 – The mustard seed

If we take next week's readings as an example, we have:

Habakkuk 1.1-4 bemoaning the lack of goodness in the world. This can be a call for us to be generous in our care of others. When we see wrongdoing, what is our sacrifice to overcome the evil?

Psalm 37. Verse 3 tells us to trust in the Lord and be doing good; dwell in the land and be nourished with the truth. Again, is this a call for us to be outward looking in our lives, to be in our communities and be doing good towards our neighbour?

2 Timothy 1.1-14. In verse 14, Paul tells Timothy to "Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us". Is this a call to good stewardship of the treasure that we have been given by the grace of God? If we are good stewards, we need to be allocating our resources wisely. That wisdom is what comes from the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit dwells within us, we should know that the treasure that we have is to be shared so that we can proclaim the Good News of Christ.

Luke 17.5-10. When the apostles said to the Lord "Increase our faith", his response was to use the symbolism of a mustard seed. If we have faith, let what little we have grow and take over. Let our small offering yield great results. By this, we increase the faith of others and therefore of ourselves.