**Holy Habits: Sharing Resources – week 7**

So far in this series we have covered some very important resources we can and do share: hope and encouragement, food and fellowship and food for others, ourselves in showing love, God’s people in the church in service to others, and God’s generosity to us in creation and in forgiveness.  This week, I want to look at the how the first Christians gave us this Holy Habit in Acts chapter 2 verses 43-44: *All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another.  They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed.*  Does the Bible have anything to teach us about sharing our possessions, including our money?

The Bible actually says a great deal about this subject.  In the Jewish law it was forbidden to mistreat poor people (eg Exodus 22 verse 25); rather, the poor are to be treated with kindness (eg Exodus 23 verse 11).  The idea of giving away one-tenth (a “tithe”) of your income to support God’s servants goes right back to Abraham (Genesis 14 verse 20).  The book of Proverbs has 44 references to the poor, eg *Protect the rights of the poor and needy* (Proverbs 31 verse 9b).  The prophets are fierce in their condemnation of those who mistreat the poor (eg Isaiah 3 verses 14-15; Jeremiah 2 verse 34; Ezekiel 22 verse 29).

We find the same emphasis in the New Testament.  St Paul writes that *The love of money is the root of all evil* (1 Timothy 6 verse 10a, KJV), and James is even more critical than the Old Testament prophets: *And now, you rich people, listen to me! Weep and wail over the miseries that are coming upon you! … You have not paid any wages to those who work in your fields. Listen to their complaints! The cries of those who gather in your crops have reached the ears of God, the Lord Almighty* (chapter 5 verses 1 and 4) – the need for Fair Trade is nothing new, and it matters to God.

And what about Jesus?  I have read somewhere that teaching about money is the second most frequent subject in His teaching, after only the Kingdom of Heaven.  I am sure we all know what He said about the widow’s mite (Mark 12 verses 41-44 and Luke 21 verses 1-4), the rich young ruler and the camel going through the eye of the needle (Matthew 19 verses 16-30; Mark 10 verses 17-31; Luke 18 verses 18-30), and the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25 verses 31-46).  Incidentally, having seen sheep and goats herded together in Europe’s only desert in south-east Spain, and also in West Africa, where they are not nearly as healthy and plump as in England’s green and pleasant land, I know how hard it is to tell them apart.  The only sure way is that the tails go up for one and down for the other, but I won’t tell you which is which.

Perhaps the least well known of all the teachings of Jesus, and certainly the one most ignored, is what He said to his disciples in Luke 12 verse 33.  I shall be surprised if you know it without looking it up.  Some parts of the church in this country are arguing at the moment about the importance of taking some bits of the Bible literally, but I don’t think I know anyone who takes these words of Jesus literally, even though they are a direct command which Jesus gave to His disciples: *Sell all your belongings and give the money to the poor.* And this brings us back directly to the Holy Habit of Sharing Resources, because this is what the first Christians did in Acts chapter 2, in the verses with which this email began.  They obeyed Jesus and were blessed by God.

For me, three things follow from this verse.  Firstly, I need to ask Christ’s forgiveness for failing to follow His teaching, remembering with gratitude that Christ died on the Cross to guarantee my (and your) forgiveness.  Secondly, I cannot expect other people to take other commands in the Bible literally while I do not obey this direct command of Jesus, because it would seem hypocritical to me.  Thirdly, I need to give as generously as I can to the many good causes that are all around us in this community and in this needy world.

This email was prepared before the ratcheting up of the coronavirus crisis this weekend.  I realise it is not as optimistic as my previous email last week.   The hope and encouragement in that email remains true.  However bad things get in the modern world, the eternal message of Christ’s birth and death and resurrection remain true.  The teaching of Jesus about money is important, and ought to feature in “Sharing Resources”, but His teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven is even more important.  May the eternal truth and hope of the Christian message help us in every part of our lives.

*Produced by Glenn Evans on behalf of the Bents Green Holy Habits Planning Group (Debs Barnett, Glenn Evans, Martyn Read, Graham Wassell, Daphne and John Wilkins).  All quotations from the Good News Translation unless otherwise stated.  You can find more information on the Circuit Holy Habits Programme on the Sheffield Methodist Circuit website and also the Sheffield Methodist Circuit Facebook page.*