

Let me share with you a rabbi's tale:

Two brothers began a milling business. One was married with a family and one was single. They determined right at the beginning of the establishment of their business that they would split the excess flour 50-50, half for me, half for my brother. They agreed to it, no problem. A little time passed and business was prosperous and things were going well and they kept their bargain and finally one day the single brother said to himself, "you know my brother has wife and children. He has much more demand on his resources. It's not fair for me to have half and for him to have half. I know what I am going to do." But he didn't want to embarrass his brother so he figured out how he was going to do it. In the darkness of night, he was going

to take from his extra store and shift it over into his brothers. And that's what he did.

Well not too long after that the married brother said, "you know what, I am just so blessed by wife and family and my poor brother over here, he is single and he doesn't have all of those blessings. It's not fair that I have as much as he does. I am going to give to him so he has an extra blessing." And he did the same exact thing as his brother. He took from the storage that he had and he started secretly at night putting it in his brother's extra store.

And everyday these guys woke up and looked at their storage bins and neither one of them saw them going down. They were equal all the time. Well the inevitable happened. One night they ran in to each other, each holding their bag of flour, and they looked at each other and embraced.

And the rabbis say that God reached down and touched that spot of their love and said, "This is where I will build my temple, because it must become a place of generosity."

God has given generously to us and asks us to respond to that generosity by generously giving, out of love, to others.

Winston Churchill once said **"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."**

The rabbi's tale is a story about giving in love.

For the vast majority of us in this country and particularly in this church and benefice, God has provided us with much. So - open your eyes to see the extraordinary, generous blessings of God's grace and presence in amongst the ordinary, the countless 'more than enough' with which God graces us – graces you. It is from this place of richness that God asks us to give – and particularly our time, or skills & talents, & our money.

Paul, writing in his second letter to the Church in Corinth says that we should not give reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

When someone generously gives you a present, the first thing we often say is 'Thank you'. Remember to say 'thank

you to God' – for his generosity to you – ultimately demonstrated in Jesus.

Often, when we are grateful, thankful, for something that someone has done for us, we buy them a present, willingly, out of love in recognition for who they are and what they have done for us.

That is how God desires our giving. So - How do you respond to all that God has lavishly and generously given to you?

"A Witty person once said, "There are three kinds of givers in the world - the flint, the sponge and the honeycomb.

"To get anything out of the flint, you must hammer it, and then you get only flint and sparks.

"To get anything out of a sponge you must squeeze, and the more you squeeze the sponge, the more you will get.

"But the honeycomb overflows with its own sweetness.

"Some people are stingy and hard; they give nothing away if they can help it.

"Others are good natured; they yield to pressure, and the more they are pressed, the more readily and abundantly

they give.

"A few delight in giving without being asked at all, and of these, the Bible says, "The Lord loves a cheerful giver.""

Which are you, flint, sponge or honeycomb?

In our gospel reading: the well known account of the feeding of the 5,000 – Jesus takes a small offering and transforms it by a miracle to meet a need (the need of hungry people). Jesus worked in partnership with his friends – the disciples – so that the need was met.

The disciples responded to the call of Jesus by leaving their jobs, their possessions, their money and their families.

The disciples gave everything.

As a disciple how do you respond to the lavish, gracious generosity of God, in creation, in his gifts to you, in redeeming you by the gift – the death and resurrection of his one and only Son?

God has given you and me so much - more that perhaps we deserve. More than perhaps we REALLY need.

It is given FROM HIM to us, with love.

As King David said "All things come from you, Lord."

All that we have – our life, our gifts, our money, our time, is given to us from God. We are but stewards of these things.

But money and possessions – they're mine, surely!

As a disciple, as a Christian, as a son or daughter of God, how can we not respond to all that God has done for us?

We're called to be a living sacrifice – to offer all that we are **and all that we have** back to God, so that he may have the freedom to use us and all that we have – time, gifts and talents – for his purpose – for his glory. So that the Kingdom of God might grow in depth and love.

God provides what the church needs to be the church.

God provides us individually with our need – and he provides us with the money resources – the people with time – the people with gifts and talents, so that the church might operate.

But it means that YOU and I have to respond. WE have to act.

It is part of our commitment to being a Christian, part of our calling, part of our response to God for all that he means to us and provides for us.

It begins with you, and it begins with me.

As part of our harvest worship this year there will be an opportunity to reflect on all that God has given us – money, time and talents and to seek with all our heart what God is calling us to offer for him to transform by a miracle into that which grows the Kingdom of God.

We want to be a mission church (a growing church) – not a missing church (one which is locked up and redundant).

But it begins with me and it begins with you.

All that is necessary for this church to grow is literally with you and with me. It is God's gift of money, time and talents entrusted to each of us – to you – to me – that God asks us to give back to him so that he might work a miracle.