

‘No Collection’ Sunday – You’ll never believe it!

6th June 2004 am

2 Corinth 9:6-15

(1A) ‘No Collection’ Sunday – you’ll never believe it!

It would be difficult to imagine a service in a Presbyterian Church that did not include ‘the collection’! – Although, so far, on this ‘No Collection’ Sunday, we’ve got away with it!

But at a more serious level, I want to suggest to you that it is actually true to say that:

(1B) ‘No Collection’ = ‘No Service’

And, in Bible terms, ‘No Collection = ‘No Service’, is true in more ways than one. I want to try to pick out some of these for us now.

By the way, it is surely not insignificant, that one of the Communicant promises that follows on from the basic profession of faith is about **(1C) *giving a fitting proportion of our time, talents and money for the Church’s work in the world.***

1. Firstly,

(2) No Collection means No Service of Serious Worship

When we meet in church to worship God, we are meeting to acknowledge that God is all-important, that we recognise his rightful authority over our lives, and that we want to give him true and thankful loyalty – the word ‘worship’ actually has its origins in the word **(2A) *‘worthship’ or ‘worth it’.***

And the point about ‘the collection’ is this - our ways with money are usually a pretty accurate indication of who or what we really think is important and ‘worth it’. So this is where the ‘collection’ comes into our service. It is a critically precise way of showing that God is all important and deeply ‘worth-it’. As well as right words and warm thoughts, a service of worship needs to include real offering of ourselves and our measurable resources in life.

If we think back to the things that Jesus said on this subject during his earthly ministry, we’ll quickly and easily see this point.

- **(2B) The widow’s 2 small copper coins (Luke 21) –**

remember the simple little story of the time when Jesus watched the people at the Temple putting in their ‘collection’. As well the better off people putting in their apparently generous gifts, Jesus noticed a poor widow putting in 2 small coins – and Jesus’ observation was that she had given more than the others, because it was a gift that cost her far more and that represented a much greater sacrifice from her meagre resources – therefore, hers was ‘true worship’.

As well as that very down-to earth example, we should probably also remind ourselves of something more general that Jesus said about our attitudes to our money.

- (2C) *‘For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.’ (Matt.6: 21).*

In other words, we give the loyalty of our hearts and lives to what we actually believe to be the most important ‘treasure’ of our lives – and, as we’ve already said, our use of monetary and material resources is a very good indicator of where our hearts lie and what makes our lives tick. Monetary priorities often reveal where ‘our hearts lie’.

Therefore we can see why our ‘collection’ is a very important part of the service – a very important part of worship – ‘the collection’ not just a kind of ‘half-time’ in the service, but a very crucial part of the worship, because it is an expression of how we actually think about God and what his place in our lives amounts to.

By the way, this means that it is probably better to call it **‘The Offering’** rather than **‘The Collection’** – What we give is to be freely and gladly *offered* in worship and with thankfulness, rather than taken up as a kind of unavoidable necessity. This comes out very clearly in the passage we read part of, earlier on, from 2nd Corinth 9:

(3A) ch. 9 vs.5 *‘a a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.’*

(3B) ch.9 vs.vs.7 *‘each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly, nor under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

Against that background, I suppose that what we need to say is that what our ‘offering’ costs us is actually much more important than what it actually adds up to on the plate. The two small coins cost the widow a great deal indeed, whereas the significantly larger offerings of the other people maybe didn’t cost them all that much. If our gifts are to be significant expressions of God’s priority in our lives, and heartfelt offerings of thankfulness, then they need to cost us something – rather than being an amount that we won’t miss very much and that won’t eat into our real financial resources in any great way. And, if we are very honest with ourselves, we might have to admit that there is always a danger that we give in a way that doesn’t really cost us too much - that we give what is left-over after everything else has been costed and covered. Now, you don’t need to tell me how much it takes to cover everything else in our daily lives – sometimes I wonder where the money goes to! But if our ‘collection’ is to be an offering of worship and an expression of faith, then what we give has to be a serious and significant giving to God, before we spend on ourselves.

This is the Bible’s teaching throughout:

(4A) Deut. 15:21 If an animal has a defect, is lame or blind, or has serious flaw, you must not sacrifice it to the Lord your God.

- they weren’t to give God the left-overs of the flock, but the first and the best.

(4B) 1 Corinth 16:2 Each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income – the verse that appears on your weekly FWO envelope.

(4C) 2 Corinth 8:12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable, according to what one has, not what he does not have.

(Is there room for all of these on one slide?)

So ‘The Collection’ is a real part of our Worship – It is to be a true Offering, coming from the heart, showing that we truly

recognise that God is ‘worth it’, and they are to be generous, even ‘costly’ expressions of our practical resources in life.

And, above all else, according to Paul, in 2 Corinth, they should be a vital way of showing that we are truly thankful to God for the love and the hope that he has gifted to our lives through Jesus Christ. At the end of 2 chapters that are devoted to the theme of financial giving, Paul everything that he wanted to say on the subject with these words that say it all:

(5) 2 Corinth 9:15 *Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift.*

2. So, firstly we need to say:

(6A) No Collection means No Service of Serious Worship.

But there is more to say: **Secondly we have to say:**

(6B) No Collection means No Service of Solid Work.

‘No Collection’ means that the Church cannot be what it should be, and cannot do what it needs to be doing. Yes, it may ‘dander along’ quietly and happily on its limited reserves and resources, ‘keeping the wheels turning’ - but the church will not be able to be properly effective if we are not making our ‘offerings’ in the way that we have talked about already. Its hands will be tied, and its life and work will be stifled.

A few years ago, PCI ran a campaign, cleverly called, (7A) *More than a Sunday Service*, and the whole point was that the church’s task is about much, much more than what happens for an hour on a Sunday, and that church membership is about more than that hour.

This phrase, ‘a Sunday Service’ is most often used to describe the very limited bus or train service that is available on Sundays and on public holidays – ‘*More than a Sunday Service*’ is meant to remind us that the church should always be providing more than a skeleton service – that the church’s task is to be very committed to caring for all its members pastorally and practically, as well as being very active in working positively among all age groups spiritually, so that they are helped to come to faith and grow in

faith – so that the kingdom of Christ is built in individual lives and in the church as a whole.

But ‘No Collection’ means that it is difficult to do this –

(7B) No Collection means No Service of Solid Work.

It is our regular and properly thought out offerings that make the work of the church ‘*More than a Sunday Service*’.

For Churches to be what they are supposed to be, doing the solid work they should be doing, they have to ‘invest steadily in the work’ – just as any effective and forward thinking business has to have steady and wise investment. So in churches, depending on their size and opportunities, they have to do all of the following:

i) Churches have to invest in adequate staff, and in larger churches that needs to mean more than ‘the minister’ – and of course in any ‘business’, staff are an expensive part of the budget.

ii) Churches have to build a structure of church life that will provide good opportunities for Christian friendship and discipleship – organisations and activities that will be appropriate to all the many different groups and needs of the people in the church. This will involve many members in roles of service and leadership – and if such work is to be effective, it has to be financially resourced..

iii) Churches have to provide and maintain suitable premises in which to do the work, and the proper equipment within those buildings - we are so thankful for the buildings that we have, and for the good progress that we are making in reducing our building fund debts.

For a church to be a church of solid work in the service of Christ and of the people who are connected to it, churches always need substantial financial resources.

- I suppose we could look at it from a fairly self-centred angle – for the church to be the church I want for myself and my family, it needs resources!
- But there is a better way to think about it - for the church to do the job it needs to do for all its members, it needs good financial resources.

When we come to a topic like today's, there is always a danger that preachers make it sound as if they are unaware of, and ungrateful for, the generous and committed giving of many people – that would be a wrong impression, and it is important to state this – to use the opportunity to say a warm word of appreciation and acknowledgement to all who give to the church so that it may do a solid work.

However, it is also important, and right, that we allow a topic like today's, to challenge us and make us think. It should make us think about the work that the church could and should be doing, and it should challenge us about the level of our own commitment and giving.

As in most organisations, our Session and Committee often finds itself, recognising many highly desirable proposals and possibilities in our church work, but having to make hard decisions about which priorities we are able to resource and fund. In one sense, it is a good thing to have to identify the priorities, but in another way, it is a bad thing when some of the top priorities have to be put 'on a very long finger'.

We know, only too well, the heavy demands that we all have to cope with in providing for our homes and families etc – and these too are very important Christian priorities – but sometimes we also need to sit down and take a look at what we spend on some of the categories in our weekly or annual budget – on sport, on entertainment, on clothes, on TV subscriptions, on internet and phone charges – and so on, and so on – and we need to make sure that we are being realistic and committed in our support for the work of Christ within our church life.

There are a few phrases in parts of 2 Corinth 8 and 9, that underline this theme for us today.

(8A) 2 Corinth 8:19 the offering which we administer in order to honour the Lord himself – which is a good reminder for all of us involved in the decisions about the financial resources of church life.

(8B) 2 Corinth 9:1 *There is no need for me to write about this service for the saints. For I know your eagerness to help ...* – in giving our offerings, we are not just giving so that we will receive back ourselves, but so that we can make the solid work of the Church possible among all its people – this is *a service for the saints*.

There is a very real sense in which church membership is absolutely free – it is not like any other club or organisation, where there will normally be set ‘membership fees’. In the church we are only asked to give what we can – but this means that, if we truly care about the work that the church does and could be doing, we need to encourage ourselves to give as fully as we can, not the minimum. Perhaps we really need to learn to think like the members of the early church that Acts 4 tells us about, where it says that out of their resources they brought the money and put it at the apostle’s feet – so that it could be used for Christian work – and some of them, were extremely generous and deeply committed in doing so – thereby making it possible for the early church to do a solid work. And so I want to encourage myself, and you, to be thinking about how our offerings are helping the church to do as solid a work as possible.

So,

(9A) No Collection means No Service of Serious Worship.

and

(9B) No Collection means No Service of Solid Work.

3. Finally,

(9C) No Collection Means No Service of Seeking Witness.

By ‘*seeking witness*’ I’m thinking of the task that Jesus gave his Church - to reach out far beyond itself and its existing members, and to seek and serve other people.

At the time of his Ascension Jesus told his disciples that they were to be his *witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*. (Acts 1:11) – This had been a very big theme in Jesus whole ministry – his disciples were

called to be *'fishers of men'* - and the Bible makes it clear that this responsibility has not ceased – the Church is to serve people who do not yet belong to it, and who may not even care much about its existence – this caring and serving is to express itself in being concerned for people's practical needs, and it is to be combined with an urgent desire to seek to do everything possible, so that they, too, will come know and believe in the Gospel of Christ for their lives and for their eternal well-being.

So, when we think about *'giving our offerings'* to the work of the church we have to get 'way beyond' the idea of simply giving for our own church and for the benefits we get from belonging to it. We have to learn, and relearn, to think in terms of giving in a way that is ***sacrificial*** - because somebody else, either in our own community or in some other part of the world will benefit.

This is actually the precise reason why Paul wrote about 'giving offerings' in 2 Corinth 8-9, the section from which we read. He was encouraging the Corinthians to help to meet Christian needs elsewhere – their giving wasn't going to benefit themselves directly at all – it was for the practical and spiritual good of other people. And says, Paul, their committed giving was acting as a powerful witness in itself. Listen to what he says at the end of the chapter:

(10) Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the Gospel. 2 Corinth 9:13

Their sacrificial caring and giving was making the Gospel convincing to others, and bringing honour to God in new places and in new lives. Their giving was essential as a means of *'seeking witness'*.

So all of this is a reminder to us that we ought to be glad when at least some of our offerings are used for reaching out in our own community – often most obviously through our children's and youth work, but also in social and evangelistic work among adults.

And this is also a reminder to us that it is absolutely right, according to the Bible, that some of our offerings go to support missionary work, elsewhere in Ireland and all around the world. We should be very happy and very enthusiastic about the proportion of our Offerings that go firstly, to support PCI's co-ordinated mission budget through the United Appeal, and the additional support, above this, that we are able to give to the Dalzells and other mission projects.

It's harder, sometimes, to think 'this big' and to give this generously, when it's not for ourselves and our own church activities, but it is very much part of what Christian giving is about and what Church offerings are for.

Maybe that's why Paul quoted these words of Jesus to the young church at Ephesus:

(11A) It is more blessed to give than to receive. Acts 20:35

And Jesus also said to his disciples on one occasion:

(11B) Freely you have received, freely give. (Matt.10:8)

So when we are making our offerings, we need to be glad that some of them will go out from our church for Christian witness, and we ought, therefore, to be adding-in this dimension to our thinking about what we will give – for such witness cannot happen without substantial financial resources, which the churches must provide – otherwise the work of seeking witness will not be done – and we might then have to ask ourselves if we can pray the words of the Lord's Prayer with a clear conscience.

(11C) *'Thy kingdom come'*

So 'No Collection' Sunday? – Well, not really.

It may not matter so much about whether we prefer to give week by week in church, or in larger amounts at intervals, or by standing orders at the bank, but our offerings will say a lot about how much we feel our faith in Christ is 'worth it'. For **(12)**

- 1. No Collection means No Service of Serious Worship.**
- 2. No Collection means No Service of Solid Work.**
- 3. No Collection Means No Service of Seeking Witness.**

Sunday 6th June, 2004 at 11.30am

Welcome

Call to Worship

Praise: *And can it be?*

Sacrament of Baptism

(Aaronic Blessing)

Praise: *Our children, Lord ...* (Hy. 549)

(Children Leave)

Announcements (No collection at this point)

Reception of New Communicants

Introduction

Profession and Promises of Faith

Prayer

Formal Welcome into Full Church Membership

Praise: *All I once held dear ...*

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Sermon: *'No Collection Sunday'*

Offering and Dedication of the Offering!

Praise: *There is a redeemer ...* (GTG 30)

Benediction