

20 February 2022 St Thomas Revd John Morris

Today is painful for me in a couple of ways. Firstly, it's painful because I dislike talking about money and church finances, and secondly because it shouldn't be necessary. It's over two years since I last preached on the subject of money, and there are things we should be celebrating and things we should be examining our consciences about.

On paper, The Bourne is amongst the wealthiest parishes in the whole of the UK. We live and worship and witness in a parish that on ALL MEASURES is amongst the least deprived – or to put it another way, the most privileged in the country. Yet our parish faces an on-going problem. Over the last few years our expenditure has exceeded our income. There have been some good reasons for this and Covid hasn't helped but it doesn't take a brain the size of the Archbishop of Canterbury's to work out that there are two responses possible. (I'm discounting the one that says we go bankrupt and close the church!) We can reduce our outgoings or we can increase our income.

Attempts are being made to maximise income from letting out our facilities, and we have looked long and hard at ways of reducing our expenditure but the bottom line is that if we do nothing some things will have to go. The Parish Share has to be paid – we get no choice over that, and the next biggest outgoing is staff wages. Who shall we make redundant? Shall we do without an organist, or a Director of Music, or an Administrator? Should the choir go? Or would you like to amalgamate with a local parish and share a vicar with another church?

If we were being profligate with money I'd be making suggestions for savings but I don't believe that we are. Our budget (as a Parish) is LESS than similar parishes in the Diocese. Other parishes in the Diocese give more generously and that enables them to do more work and support and grow their church. Furthermore, the church should be putting money on one side to be ready to meet emergencies like the rendering the East wall and roof. We shouldn't have to have emergency appeals. We should be able to budget for these things. It's fantastic that due to a generous legacy and the outstanding work by Mike Barter and his team, we are more or less on track to see our organ repaired. People respond to emergencies generously but we

shouldn't have to have 'special appeals' for what is essentially on-going maintenance.

The bottom line is that we need regular and generous givers. More people need to sign up to giving by standing order or through the parish giving scheme. And if you already subscribe then we are asking you to have a long hard think about whether you could increase your regular giving.

I am also very aware that although we live in a wealthy area, not everyone is cash rich. In fact lots of people have limited budgets and can't manage to give much compared to others. I also know some of you are already very generous, and some of you are very generous with your time and expertise. And some people work diligently for the parish but are unable to give very much, but the old adage that every little counts is still true.

It's also true that some people seem to have little idea of how church finances actually run. The frugal churchgoer walked into the house panting and almost completely exhausted. "What happened?" inquired his wife. "It's a great new idea I have to be a better steward of our resources," he gasped. "I ran all the way home from the stewardship committee meeting behind the bus and saved £1.50. "That wasn't very bright," replied his flustered wife. "Why didn't you run behind a taxi and save £10?"

A 50 p discovered that it was about to be retired from circulation. It met in the Royal Mint where, it became acquainted and struck up a conversation with a £50 note that was meeting the same fate.

The £50 note began reminiscing about its travels all over the world. "Life has been good," the fifty exclaimed. "Why, I've been to London, New York the finest restaurants in Paris, and I've just returned from a cruise in the Caribbean."

"Wow!" said the 50p, "you're fortunate to have been able to visit all those places."

"So where all have you been in your lifetime little 50p," says the £50 note? "Well, I've been to ... the Methodist Church, the Baptist Church, the United Reformed Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Lutheran Church, the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, the Quaker Church, the Pentecostal Church, Messy Church, but mostly I've been to the Anglican Church." "Excuse me," says the £50 note, "but what's a church?"

We should be proud and grateful to those who are generous and give regularly to the parish. You know who you are (don't look too worried, I intentionally keep my self blissfully unaware of who gives what.) I have a rule. I keep strictly at arms-length from the day to day finances, but strategically, I am interested and I'm concerned, because the bills need to be paid. We have a wonderful building, a wonderful choir and wonderful fellowship in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We have a wonderful new choir director but the bills need to be paid and at the moment we are spending from what little reserves we have just to keep up.

As I believe that there's a fine line between a long, drawn-out talk about our church finances and a hostage situation, hopefully you've got the message by now and I'll end it here.

There's been a bit of a debate about how I should encourage you. There's a debate about whether I should talk about percentages but that's all a bit complicated, or whether I should say. "Give an extra five pounds or an extra ten pounds." I'm not sure that either is apt or relevant because I don't know your situation. I don't know where you're from and what you can afford. What I do know is that God gives to us generously. He gives to us more than we can imagine and more than we deserve. We are part of a wonderful church here, and a wonderful parish; we ought to pay our way and we need to respond, all of us together. So if you don't give by standing order or as part of the parish giving scheme, please sign up. There are going to be some people in the entrance as you go out. They don't need to know how much necessarily, but they'll help you with forms that you can take away or show you how to do it. Please review if you have signed up, and be generous. If everyone responds appropriately, then our church will flourish and continue to grow. It's as simple as that. It's a wonderful thing to be part of a growing and flourishing church. We need to respond generously to keep that going.

In the name of the One God who gives his love freely to us and who gave his son who gave his life for us all, and in the Holy Spirit that surprises us with grace freely given. Amen