

## **SERMON: Sunday – 7 August 2022 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **Kindness, Generosity and Service**

Luke 12:32-40

Believe it or not, I'm old enough to remember the days when the actor Bernard Cribbins read the stories on the children's TV show, *Jackanory* and starred as the kindly Mr Perks in the original 1970 film, *The Railway Children*. His voice, with its enthusiasm for life, were etched in my mind from a young age. And, as a child, the Mr Perks character was the kind of person I was drawn to and wanted to have around because he was approachable, kind and you just felt like he'd have the answer to whatever problem might arise.

Brought up in very humble beginnings, Cribbins died last week at the age of 93 after 80 years in the entertainment business. Yes he was acting in theatre from age 13. Many people have said kind things about him in these days since his death.

For example, his TV co-presenter, Floella Benjamin, described him as just the most kind and generous man. What a lovely way to be remembered. As kind and generous.

True happiness is found in serving others with generosity and kindness.

Passion Art is a volunteer served charitable movement of Christian people who explore the way art and faith impact everyday life. Their mission is to recover beauty, stillness and compassion at the heart of their communities through collective acts of creativity.

So in July this year, two of them got together to do something creative and beautiful in their city. They called it "Gifts to the City" aiming at reminding people to embrace their stories of loss and self-worth; to help people feel seen and less alone, to create a sense of hope and healing in the midst of the daily battles people face.

One artist made 120 ceramic Kintsugi Pots - broken pots repaired with flecks of gold - and another group from a local church made 120 wooden engravings with the words "You are Enough" engraved on pieces of oak, tied with a red ribbon. They took them and hid them in places around Manchester knowing that people would find them and wonder.

They made up a website saying they hoped the people of Manchester would find these treasures and keep them as gifts and invited people to share comments about the project if they wanted to. One person who found one of

the items left this comment on the website, “thank you, this brightened my day. I have lived in Manchester for four years and the love in the city never ceases to amaze.”

<https://www.gifttothecity.org/comments>)(<https://www.manchestersfinest.com/arts-and-culture/two-artists-have-created-a-manchester-wide-hidden-art-trail-to-remind-us-we-are-not-alone/>)

An example of a random act of kindness - leaving treasure for people to discover in the midst of the busy city centre.

Jesus put it this way: sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Where your treasure is there your heart will be also.

In other words there is a key to true happiness linked to what we do with our money, possessions, our time, our energy our passion.

Wouldn't it be great to give ourselves to the cause of the kingdom of God, the cause that Jesus came for? The cause that got Jesus into trouble? The cause that Jesus died for?

I suppose if we're mean and tight fisted, with our time as well as with whatever other resources we have, we're going to find this hard going.

But I recognise also that not everyone can afford to be generous. We're living through perhaps the worst cost of living crisis that many of us have seen. Alright, it's perhaps not like it was during the war but nevertheless, people are in real poverty.

We meet some people on poverty as regular customers to our local charity, Reuse and Thrive. And I know Brenda and others who volunteer, meet some people struggling with debt as clients of Christians Against Poverty.

So, as Jesus said, the poor will always be with us, there will always be opportunities for kindness and generosity, with our time, talents and energy as much as with our money.

Let me make mention of the second half of Luke 12 in which Jesus speaks of being ready, dressed for action with our lamps lit.

I suppose this means that we would want to be found generous and kind at any moment. This means that every moment is an opportunity to be kind and

generous, because that is the state that we want to be found in when all is accounted for or when our end comes or when the time comes to call it a day, to move on to what's next, all of which could be ways of saying when the Son of Man comes.

So we want to be practising generosity and kindness as often as we can because that is how God is towards us. Can we be so towards one another and towards others?

Dressed ready for action is to adopt a position of service like the slave waiting for the master's return and who finds that this master turns the tables and himself takes on the nature of a servant.

As Paul wrote to the Philippians about Jesus,

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
who, though he existed in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be grasped,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave”

Philippians 2:3-7

I read a Heart Edge report last week about New Ways of Being Church; of Being a Pioneering Parish, Joining in with Where God is Moving Already.

In those few words we can find a healthy vision for a kind and generous church which seeks to serve. In fact, there's a good mission statement - to be a movement of kindness and generosity seeking to serve others.

The article I read is part of a monthly mailing and often has good ideas in it, like the idea I mentioned at the beginning about giving away treasure.

There were other examples of local churches hosting or joining in with local arts events, music events and drama.

And in a day when the church nationally is considering the legacy of so many church buildings, I wonder if we need to be thinking creatively, generously and servant like when it comes to the buildings we have at our disposal.

They really can be an asset to local communities if made available. I know we do that to some extent already but I think we have the opportunity to use our resources even more.

Rather than see our buildings as a millstone, a burden which seeks to hold us back, might there be, for example, an opportunity to partner with other local trust organisations to manage our church buildings as a venue?

Are there other ways we can serve our communities of KN and EC by hosting the kind of events that people would want to come to?

And what adaptations might we need to make to make our buildings fitter for multiple purposes more than simply using them for sometimes only an hour or two a week?

These are questions that churches have been asking now for decades and some have made bold changes whilst others haven't.

Jesus didn't say anything about us needing a building. But we have them and it makes sense to steward them as best we can.

Can we use them to minister kindness and generosity with our community? And what might that look like?

Answers on a postcard to the Kirk session who are being invited to try to answer questions like these as we plan for future growth in mission..

So this week let's all watch (and maybe even pray) for an opportunity to serve kindly and generously. And let's come back next week and share the good news stories of what happened.

Let us pray,

Loving God, thank you for the example of kindness and generosity in your Son and in those inspired by his Spirit. Make us like him and them as we seek your kingdom here in KNEC. In Jesus name. Amen.