**7th November 2021**

**Call to worship**

Let us open our hearts, our minds, and our eyes
to see the generous gifts of God,
and respond with praise and thanksgiving.



**A prayer of approach**

Eternal God, you call us to this time and place,
to still our minds and gather our thoughts,
to see the immensity of your giving to us.
You are the giver of life in all its fullness;
the giver of gifts beyond compare;
the giver of more than we can imagine or comprehend.
We come before you now.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of adoration**

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
one in three and three in one, we adore you –
for you are light in our darkness;
you are the calm in our turmoil;
you are the wealth in our poverty;
the meaning in our pointlessness;
the hope in our despondency;
the meaning in our being.
For all of this and so much more,
we worship you.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

**A prayer of confession**

Lord Jesus Christ,
we come to you in sorrow for our selfishness,
in regret for our greed,
in despair over our blindness and deafness
to the needs of those around us.
With penitent hearts we seek your forgiveness,
and your blessing to make us more generous,
more giving, more able to see, and more willing to listen.
**Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

Our God of generosity forgives those who truly repent.
Our God lifts the burdens from our hearts
and the blindness from our eyes
and sets us free to be the people we are called to be.
**Amen.**



**Mark 12.38-44**

I saw a cartoon on social media that had thew United Nations General Secretary asking delegates who wants to give up climate change. All the hands went up. Then the next question was who wants to give up their private jets. The cartoon shows various figures such as Bill Gates, Leonardo Di Caprio, Joe Biden, Boris and a few others all looking down at their feet.

It is a cheap joke and much mirth has been made of the various hypocrisies on show at the COP 26 summit in Glasgow looking at Climate Crisis. Who will make the sacrifice to save the planet?

**Our Bible passage today is about sacrifice**. Jesus is sat watching people give gifts into the Temple offering. The rich give large gifts but out of their own abundance. A widow gives only a few pence but it is all that she has to live on. Who gives the most?

The example of the widow’s offering is extremely relevant to the current discussions going on at COP26.[[1]](#endnote-1) The wealthiest nations, whose current prosperity has been built on the burning of fossil fuels, are debating how much of their wealth they can sacrifice in the name of arresting climate change. Meanwhile, less developed countries and those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change such as the small island states of the Pacific or those countries who have not contributed as much to our current predicament, are being forced to take proportionately greater action. Richer nations are giving “out of their abundance” as Jesus says, whereas poorer countries are giving all that they have. The West was already making the switch to renewable energy but countries such as India currently depend on fossil fuels and have 27 million people who don’t even have access to electricity. Like the people in front of Jesus, countries today have differing capacity to change and different starting points but the key issue is giving sacrificially and not just for show.

It is an open question whether our democracies are failing us. Accountable to the public they usually never want to make the sacrifices that are unpopular to avert climate disaster. The public are not to be trusted, they don’t understand, or care, they are too selfish or too short sighted. Some suggest that authoritarian regimes are better placed to take unpopular decisions and tough decisions because they are not at the whim of the electorate. But the fact is those authoritarian states like China haven’t performed much better historically. Despite the considerable flaws in our democratic systems it is the best hope we have got. Or as Winston Churchill’s pithy summary went democracy is the worst from of government except for all the others.

**People can be willing to make sacrifices if their heart is in it. If they see the purpose and get the vision. People can and do make sensible decisions if they have the evidence they need and the influence and means to do it and the heart for it.**

**This passage –** beginning ‘Beware of the scribes’ (v.38) – follows directly after the scribe who is commended because he was ‘not far from the kingdom of God’ (v.34).[[2]](#endnote-2) The story is set in the Temple precincts. Here there are scribes and other important people, but there are also the destitute.

Imagine the scene. Jesus takes his position and watches people as they make their donations to the Temple. These donations would have been over and above the tithe and the Temple tax. But not only does Jesus’ watch, he also comments, He compares the gift by a widow who gives pennies (v.42) and that of the rich who give ‘large sums’ (v.41). Prefacing his words with ‘Truly’ (v.43) he tells us that this is important, and we must take note.

Then in these few verses, Jesus inverts the criteria by which we assess importance. What God sees is not the total given, but that the personal cost of the gift to the individual is the real measure of generosity. It is the heart of the giver, rather than the gift, that is important. The widow gives her all, probably literally, whereas the rich give from what they have left over. It is generosity of a different order.

The scribes were the legal experts. They like their status, and they had a reptation for piety but are only interested in lining their pockets. The world doesn’t change: people will put on a show but underneath they are after money.

They devour widows houses says Jesus. Most likely this reference is to the scribes’ activity as a literate class working for the wealthy; they would have administered loan agreements and then confiscated the widows’ property when the loan could not be repaid. Throughout the Bible widows, along with orphans, are special objects of God’s compassion, for without a man to provide for them, they were the most vulnerable people. Their treatment was a measure of the justice or injustice of the society in which they lived. Being a widow or an orphan was not your fault, was not something you could change. You deserved compassion but often the system exploited you.

The indictment of the scribes for their treatment of widows is followed by this story of giving to the temple treasury. Most commonly this passage is understood as contrasting the deep devotion of the poor widow with the public display of generosity of the wealthy. As such, she, rather than the wealthy is a positive image of discipleship: she gave all she had.

**An alternative interpretation** hears the passage as a condemnation of the way the poor are manipulated to give all they have to support the temple. Jesus may say the widow gave out of her poverty and put everything she had into the offering – but he does not say whether this was a good thing or not. He doesn’t criticize the widow nor commend the widow. What the passage is really getting at is a criticism of the wealthy and how the rich make sure they stay rich and exploit the poor.

**Jesus is watching.** In our gospel reading, Jesus sat and watched from opposite the treasury as the crowd offered their gifts. Speakers at the COP summit have said the “the world is watching” but we know that the creator of the world, who gave humanity stewardship over it, is watching too.

Franklin Graham has responded to the Prime Minister's comments on the urgency of the climate crisis[[3]](#endnote-3), where he said it is now "one minute to midnight on the doomsday clock" in the race to prevent global heating from surpassing a critical threshold. Graham, the son of Billy Graham, said that time is running out on God's judgement.

‘I believe we're one minute to midnight - not regarding climate change, but on God's clock, when he will bring judgment on those who have rejected him & his son, Jesus Christ." Graham said that climate change is "nothing new" and is a display of God's wrath towards humanity.

Well, I’d agree and disagree with Franklin Graham. Yes, we all need to be ready and at peace with God, though I don’t have the fearful view of the God that franklin Graham believes in who is going to get you if you have rejected him and his son. More that you have missed out on knowing that you are deeply loved by God and how that could have changed your life for the better.

I also disagree with him that climate change is nothing new – the scientific community overwhelming says it is and it is because of human activity. It can only be God’s judgement on us in the sense of leaving us to face the consequences of our own decisions.

For Christians there is a sense of accountability to a God who will ultimately judge each person for the actions they have taken. This is true for our leaders – but also for each one of us in terms of how we steward the resources that we have been given as well as how well we engage with the machinery of politics to demand our leaders work for the good of all of God’s creation.

**Sacrifice.** It almost seems like a spiritual law that there is no blessing without sacrifice, there is no gain without pain. Sacrifice seems to be the test of character, the proof of commitment, the down payment for blessing, the gift that God honours.

I know that many preachers have used this passage, and arguably misused this passage in my belief by encouraging people to give sacrificially for the work of the temple, the church. It is true that unless someone steps up, someone gives of their time, their gifts, their energy, their money the church won’t progress. Sacrifice is always called for as a spiritual law for that unlocks blessings.

When related to money as this specific story recalls it reveals the heart of people – the generous deep devotion of the widow or the calculating heart of the rich scribes. But I would argue that a true interpretation of this passage is the exploitation by the rich of the poor: unlike the wealthy whose gifts would not be missed and would not cause them any hardship or discomfort the widows gift took food right out of her mouth.

**What are you giving?**

Anyone who was vegetarian before the current publicity around COP26 began is justified in pointing out that their diet has a smaller carbon footprint than those who eat meat. However, the account of the widow is one of sacrificial giving – not resting on what has already been done. Politicians are never quick to demand painful sacrifices from their electorate but we know that the crisis facing our planet is one that needs serious and lasting changes.

**As Jesus travels to Jerusalem and the Cross, he emphasizes the total commitment that we owe to God – and how that contrasts with what appears to be costly discipleship, but which in reality has no real cost at all.**The model for Christians is always Jesus, who gave up everything for us. We cannot always demand that others make the changes that are required without first looking at ourselves. May God help us to be generous and compassionate in our giving and our sacrifices as we follow the way of Jesus who gave all that we may live.

We come and gather round the table and remember that sacrifice now.





**Prayers of intercession**

*You could use the first part of these prayers to focus on the beauty of our planet, with a time of silent reflection between each section. You could accompany the words with appropriate images.*

*The second part is a more traditional set of intercessions – with a COP26/climate challenge theme.*

*The final section could be used independently – e.g. by placing a large map on the floor and marking the people and places in need of prayer with tealights as they are named.*

**PART 1**

Generous God
you have created a home where all people can live in peace,
our big blue planet
so beautiful and yet so fragile.

Generous God, you give us
the ground under our feet
solid and strong
fertile and full of things that jump, crawl, wriggle and walk
bursting with plants that grow and trees for fruit and shade.
Earth to shelter and protect us.

Generous God, you give us
times and seasons;
the sun to warm our days
and the moon to light our night-time ways;
stars that sing and planets that spin.
Unknown reaches of time and space,
full of mystery and dreams.

Generous God, you give us
the air all around us
blue and alive with birds and insects
things that squawk and sing; that and buzz, flap and croak.
Air invisible but essential to life
fresh and full of movement
wild wind and gentle breeze;
air that speaks to us of the Holy Spirit’s disturbing call.
Air for us to breathe.

Generous God, you give us
water flowing and free
full of fish that swim
and whales that roam in the deep
seas, rivers, streams and lakes,
water that quenches our thirst and gives life to the plants.
Water that we cannot live without.

Generous God, you give us
choice and responsibility
where earth, air and water are matters of life and death.
May we be generous in sharing
and open hearted to the needs of developing communities
ready to limit what we have so that all may share fully
in the fullness of life you give to all.

**PART 2**

God of all creation,
you ask us to care and not to destroy;
to share and not to abuse what you have given to us.
You ask us to cherish the earth not to abuse it
and to use earth’s resources fairly and not to waste them.
Forgive our failures and renew our commitment.

God of all creation,
**May we use your gifts wisely and care for the earth.**

Generous God,
you have placed us in community
in our churches, families, schools and neighbourhoods
where we learn that we are stronger together.
You created people in your image,
so amazing and capable of so much that is good,
yet also capable of going choosing the wrong thing.
Give us ears to listen to one another,
hearts to care for each other’s pain,
and hands ready to heal the hurts of our world.
As world leaders meet to discuss climate change,
may your Spirt of truth and justice lead the way
to a more compassionate, a more equal and a simpler way of life.

God of all creation,
**May we use your gifts wisely and care for the earth.**

Generous God,
you give us all that we need for life.
May we learn to live with the same generosity that you show to us,
using resources for our need and not our greed,
and offering what we can to improve the lives of people who struggle.
May we never be closed to the parts of the world that are troubled,
or closed to the sufferings caused by our greed in the developed world.
Give us and our world leaders generosity of spirit,
so that we can walk in another person’s shoes.
May we begin to see that we share one home.
and that our actions can improve or damage life chances for others.

God of all creation,
**May we use your gifts wisely and care for the earth**

Generous God,
you count the hairs on our head
and care for the smallest of the creatures on earth.
May we live as though our days belong to you,
using the gifts of our time and our talents to serve our neighbour,
and make a difference in the world.
May we hear the cry of those in pain.
We place into your hands people who are ill
and we ask for your healing…

May we also pay attention to the cry of our earth for healing,
and the fears of the peoples in areas most at risk including:
Lagos in Nigeria; Yemen; Haiti; United Arab Emirates; Manila in the Philippines; Kiribati; Japan; the Netherlands; India and Sri Lanka and so many more…
We hold the peoples of these areas in our hearts
together with the hopes and dreams of children and young people.

God of all creation,
**may we use your gifts wisely and care for the earth.**





**A sending out prayer**

Generous God, make us generous.
Make us generous in joy,
and generous in love.
Help us to remember what we have done for us.
Remind us, every day,
that we need to share our love for you with others,
that we need to give and live generously –
for you are generous God, our God.
Be with each one of us and all whom we love,
this week and always.
**Amen.**

1. https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2021/116-november-december-2021-b/proper-27/the-week-in-focus [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2021/116-november-december-2021-b/proper-27/bible-notes [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/franklin-graham-warns-boris-johnson-the-end-times-are-near-as-he-responds-to-climate-comment?_psrc=personyzePopularArticles&utm_source=Premier%20Christian%20Media&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=12762720_Voice%20of%20hope%2005.11.2021&dm_i=16DQ,7LJS0,KCOFX7,UXTUA,1> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)