



Sermon Notes, 13 June 2021

Term Summer 2021

Series Preparing for ... the New Start (Ezra & Nehemiah)

Gatherings: the 11, the 5

Title Generosity and Sacrifice

Preacher Paul Langham

Reading – Ezra 1:1-6

Context

Please see separate sheet for the chronology of the Exile from and Return to Jerusalem

Introduction

- Ezra 1 – 6 details the Return of the first group led by Zerubbabel, who arrived in Jerusalem in 538 BC. It tells of their work and struggle to rebuild the altar and temple, which, despite lengthy delays due to opposition, was finally completed and dedicated in 516 BC. That it took 22 years was largely down to the opposition (read chapters 4 – 6), whose tactics include: deception, discouragement, disruption, accusation, force. How was it overcome? Prophecy (read 5:1-2, and note how the prophetic word re-set their relationship to *the God ... who was over them*)
- There's then a gap of around 58 years (during which the events recorded in the book of Esther take place)
- Chapters 7 – 10 Ezra arrives in Jerusalem 458 BC, a teacher and consolidator (Read 7:6-10)

GENEROSITY

Read 1:5-7 / 2:68-69 and 8:25-28

God's priority for generosity

- Creation / Inviting humankind to share the life of the Trinity (God walking in the garden in the cool of the day)
- God so loved that he gave ...
- God's love has a texture, a flavour ...

Our priority for generosity: what might a generous church look like?

... no cliques ... no need for a welcome team (even though our welcome teams are brilliant) because every member is a welcomer. Each church family member, before arriving for a Gathering, asks the Holy Spirit for eyes to see the faces we don't recognize. Asking the question, Will you sit with us? Every 6 weeks or so, we all cook double Sunday lunch and invite someone back to our home...

But that's easy, compared to Jesus' understanding of a truly generous life: read Luke 6:27-38

A generous life is not compatible with suiting ourselves the whole time. It requires sacrifice. Once the Jews had returned to Jerusalem, they reinstated the system of animal sacrifice, which could do no more than emphasise that sin leads to death. That system points ahead to Jesus, who came as perfect priest and perfect, once for all sacrifice.

QUESTIONS

- What would a truly generous Christ Church look and feel like?
- What would a truly generous life look and feel like?
- What practical steps could we each take to make that more of a reality?