

Sunday 26th September 2021

Luke 14:1, 7-15

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Good morning. I'm very croaky. I have not sung for probably about two years now that's not true is it we all sing at home online but you can tell the difference from singing normally to this croaky voice that's coming out so I do apologize a little bit this morning I do have some water so that's great!

You know a couple of years ago I was in a cafe with a friend, it was just before Christmas and I was absolutely delighted with myself because in about September I'd seen the perfect present for her so I bought this present and I wrapped it up and I'd sat on it until Christmas. Okay, and just as we were about to leave the cafe I put my hand in my bag and went don't open it until Christmas and I could see this look of horror, pure horror on my friend's face because clearly she did not have anything for me because she went um 'I've forgotten yours can I pop it in before Christmas?' and she was mortified for the simple reason that she had nothing to give in return.

We often have this desire to reciprocate, to be generous to the people who are generous towards us, and sometimes, if you're anything like me, they're generous towards us and you have to give them something that matches backwards, you know, even if you don't like them – sorry, that's just me all right - or sometimes our generosity comes with definite limits. Okay, so where I come from, you invite someone around twice and if they say no the second time well you don't invite them again, do you. Because, frankly, inviting someone twice is enough you know, it's not out of nastiness, it's just that's the way our culture is, but if we are only ever inviting people back who invite us to reciprocate. what does that mean for the people who have fallen on hard times or who find themselves isolated from us as friends or family.

Christians Against Poverty, or CAP for short, partners with churches like this and it is to help them serve and provide life-changing support to those who otherwise might be overlooked.

As Scott said, my name is Melanie Kilburn and I have the privilege of working with CAP to help people in my community in the west side of Edinburgh. Today I want to look at Jesus's approach to generosity, His instructions on how to host a feast. I'm going to read to you a little bit of the passage that we've already heard from Luke 14 12-14 we had the scene set in the earlier verses. Jesus is dining at the house of an important Pharisee. The guy has invited all his friends and they know the pecking order, okay. They've jostled for the places to get to the best bits of the at the table. The Pharisees culture was to invite the important people, those who could reciprocate and maybe help them on the social ladder, but Jesus tears this idea apart and He turns it round, and He embarrassingly tells the Pharisee, in front of all his friends, how he should have organized the party, then Jesus said to his host when you give a luncheon or dinner do not invite your friends, your brothers, your sisters, your relatives or your rich neighbors, if you do they may invite you back and so you will be repaid, but when you give a banquet invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed although they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

When Jesus is talking about a dinner here he's talking about more than a physical meal, it's code for the Kingdom of God. He's making His point about with the way that God's kingdom work,s the way that God's love works. There's a human way of loving which is reciprocal and then there's a God way of loving which is relentlessly generous, relentlessly generous. God's love to us, it's relentless, He's making a point that this is the way the kingdom works.

This is the love that we see in Jesus, that's the love he's talking about here. So, if God's if God is relentlessly generous in His love to us how should we respond?

So, obviously, we can and we should love Him back but what we're compelled to do from Jesus's teaching is love others, to join Him in a life of generosity, especially to those who find themselves struggling, isolated, overlooked. It's what flows out of the heart of the Gospel.

Now, I'm sure that you've experienced some isolation, loneliness, struggles in the events of the last two years, I certainly have, the hard truth is that for those in poverty this isolation was often an everyday experience even before the pandemic but without the Zoom quizzes and the family catch-ups. A recent survey of those who – sorry, this is a real statistic here and the statistic means people okay, so I'm sorry if I get upset about this but I love them - a recent survey says that those who have been helped by CAP found that before they were helped 75 percent had experienced loneliness or social isolation due to their circumstances.

As part of my role, I visit people in their homes and I meet people who say I don't see my family in case they ask me how I am and I can't hide that something's wrong and I would be so embarrassed if they found out that I was in debt.

What I love about CAP is it enables me and my church to provide these people with life-changing practical support but it also gives us an opportunity to invite them into our community. You have this opportunity too and now I'm going to embarrass my friends, I'm going to introduce you to Fiona but also to Maureen and Stephen. Do you want to come and stand in the middle here so everybody up there can see it, come on let's embarrass you, so Stephen and Maureen and Fiona, there you go, you're gonna wave now because they can't see, there's more people up there. Okay, Stephen and Fiona and Maureen are debt coaches and they work at the Forth Valley Debt Center and we are celebrating today that you are now part of the Forth Valley Debt Center, Okay, so you can all go and sit down now.

I hadn't told them that I was going to make them do that so there you go just so you know their faces. These are the guys that you're going to be working with as you move forward.

I'm going to show you a client video now, and I'm going to let Simon from that video tell you his story.

My now deceased wife used to look after the finances, she was the one that was good with the money, where I wasn't, and I'd built quite a lot of severe debt, unmanageable debt, so I was living in fear of eviction. I'd been served with an eviction notice from my landlords. I didn't see a way forward it didn't see a way out of it. So, I decided or I just tried to end it all.

it was actually my landlords who'd mentioned Christians against poverty they fast-tracked me and my debt coach Jim arrived in my doorstep nobody had crossed the threshold I'd been living there I think I've been there nearly two years so the biggest difference that Christians against poverty's process made for me was that it was house visits by the July of 2016 I got that wonderful telephone call from headquarters that CAP where they said Mr. Moss you are now debt free and played the harmonicas and that's one of the great sounds I've ever heard

I then went on a CAP event where I came to faith this lady put her hands on this on my shoulder and prayed for me just felt an overwhelming sense of calm and peace and love and warmth that I've never experienced before and I just knew I just knew that

what it was and committed my life to Jesus there and then

on a Sunday I can't wait to get up for service I just love the church family that I've got we're brothers and sisters in Christ but we're closer than blood

and we support each other we live our lives for each other we're there for each other and I praise God and thank God for that day that I now know he watched over me when I tried to end it all and he said no mate you're not going yet you've got lots to do

i just felt such an overwhelming sense of wanting to give something back it's turned my life around 180 degrees completely structuralist to you know having a real purpose in life now

both of my sons in conversations saw the difference that coming to faith had made to me Daz came up first he's in minor crime so he'd been in and out of prison anyway he came to the service sat at the back listened intently we happened to be having that evening some baptisms in Newcastle so he chose to come along and get baptized and I've never felt so proud in all my life it was the proudest moment sorry

obviously it was a tragic situation for us for the family but the blessings for me personally is that he's found Jesus and he's taken being taken to glory um with his maker and he's sat up there and he's looking down on us and I'm sure he's proud of what his dad's doing life can still be tough but I know that I've always got my church family around me to support me and I know that I've always got Jesus as my best friend and as it says my superhero

I'll tell you, back to the beginning of the video and I don't know if you caught this, he said for two years no one but his landlord had crossed the threshold of his house. two years.

It's just not right that someone has to live in that isolation and it's not right that as the rest of the world gets back to normality many of those with unmanageable debt like Simon they're going to remain locked in that prison of isolation and despair

Simon's story is heart rending and if this resonates with you and your story don't delay I want you to phone our free phone number to get help if you have unmanageable debt and our free phone number is 0-800-328-06

you can go on the CAP website and the number is there there's even a button if you actually go to CAP Scotland and you can click and someone will call you back please if this is you don't delay deal with your debts today

so just to explain what happens when cats when someone reaches out to cat for help what we don't do is pay people's debts for them okay what happens is um they have a home visit by a debt coach someone like Fiona or Maureen or Steven or me and we are backed up by an army of expert debt advisors back in our CAP Bradford head office these teams they work with our clients to identify the best route out of debt and that might be debt repayment or some form of insolvency we negotiate they negotiate with the creditors on their behalf and they journey with them have for however long it takes for them to become debt free now when we say the term debt free these guys smile okay they smile inside because it's our favorite term debt free it's amazing so for Fiona and Stephen and Maureen their jobs are to come alongside the clients on their journey they help the client gather the information that's needed and they help them understand the advice that comes from head office and the thing is that they need help with this they need help because they don't visit the clients on their own they need chaperones they need befrienders they need people to help with administration and publicity they need help with social events and alpha courses they need help and that's where you can come in okay on your

do we still call things pews are these pews okay so on your pews okay you have a form that you can take away and have a look at you could fill it in this morning filling this form in this morning isn't signing your life away honestly they're not like that I am but they're not okay so please if you're just interested in hearing more about our project then fill this in and give it to Fiona Stephen or Maureen or me the other thing is if you want to hear more about the charity we have some books of John Kirkby who is our founder it's his um autobiography and they're free okay you don't have to pay anything for these and there's also some stories of clients in a book called um joy stories of joy stories of hope I can't even remember what the book's called they go how embarrassing is that

each year over 2 000 people experience the freedom of becoming debt free are you going to smile debt-free and hundreds or more are helped to find employment through our job clubs or learn to live on you know navigate the life of living on the knife edge of poverty um on a low income through our life skills and our CAP money course many of you yourselves may have done the cat money course everything CAP does is about giving the church a hands-on way of loving people and connecting with people that we might not normally come into contact with

for Simon has as he experienced the love and generosity of Jesus through CAP and the local church he saw his life turn 180 degrees and that old generosity actually started to overflow from him into the people around him he went from being isolated to being a source of community and hope to his family and everybody around him doing exactly what Jesus told us to do in Luke 14 is the power of generosity in action because of one person and one church cared enough to reach out and not it was not just Simon was impacted his whole family and many other people besides were changed we actually have no idea of the impact that our generosity can have

CAP is about ordinary people like you and me in all kinds of churches making that choice and I wonder today what does that choice look like for you

perhaps you know someone like Simon and you could reach out to today or perhaps you're sitting there thinking that there's no one around you in this community that this could be affecting but I tell you from my experience there is unmanageable debt in every community every community

perhaps you have been inspired by the vision of CAP and at the heart of this movement of Christians against poverty we have over 30 000 people who give a regular monthly gift okay we call them life changes because they because their generosity is changing people's lives without them none of what I've just shared would be possible their generosity often um inspired by their faith is what drives this whole thing forward and I am going to bluntly ask you today could you do that could you join them would you join them five pounds a month on a regular giving

it'll help people like Simon get practical help come into a community rebuild their lives and have the opportunity of discovering the life-changing love of Jesus there are two ways you could give now you could give by going to visit CAP.org forward slash respond and many of you will already be giving to CAP but this is to CAP head office okay we have this army of people I've talked about down there and that's like a juggernaut that we have to keep going in the background and many of you will already give to that but what we're going to ask you to do this morning is this other form we're going to ask you rather than giving to CAP head office of course you can do that we would like you to support your local debt center the fourth valley debt center on a regular basis five pounds a month to that doesn't sound much to you maybe you can please you can give more if you want to but if everybody gave just that amount it would add up to a huge amount so that these guys can get on with the work of loving people

Scott's going to talk to Fiona in a few minutes and she's going to tell you how practically you can become directly involved our work is sustained through prayer so you could join our prayer team or you could become a befriender or a chaperone as I've said there's lots and lots of ways of becoming involved

we are all invited to God's table and His culture isn't that He just asks a couple of times with a couple of invitations and then He stops because that's enough He doesn't do that

He perseveres He pursues us and He pursues us forever we are invited to be at His table forever

He calls us to live generously to those who can't repay us just like He does towards us and He asks us to use our tables to extend that same eternal invitation to the others around us

So, thank you for listening.