Sermon for Gift Day at St John's Cambridge, 18th October 2026

Faithful God, whose mercy never fails, by your Spirit deepen our faithfulness to you, and to your living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Today is our annual GIFT DAY, and I will be reflecting on our invitation – as followers of Jesus Christ - to live sacrificially & generously, to share what we have, and to dare to inhabit (whatever our situation) the fullness of God's transforming Kingdom.

Words from St Paul's 2nd Letter to the Corinthians chapter 9 verse 6 following, a passage closely linked to our 2nd reading today, 2 Corinthians 8. 1-9:

'*The point is this: the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully… for God loves a cheerful giver…* [and] *He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God*.'

I want to share with you 2 true short stories, on a common theme, to illustrate that Leap of Faith that God calls us to, following St Paul's witness to the Corinthians about living generously… giving sacrificially of ourselves, our resources & gifts, in order to further God's transforming Kingdom.

I don't have all the answers to bringing in God's Kingdom, here in south Cambridge or in a bruised, torn & suffering world, but what I do know – from my own experience – is this: that the invitation (whatever our means) to live generously, to be holy, Christ-like & to serve our local community, if taken seriously, really does bear fruit & set the word aflame, with God's love.

So, Leap of Faith no. 1. 'Leap of Faith in Great Bowden' – this is me, about to ab-sail down the Tower of our Church in my previous village of Gt Bowden, Leicestershire, which dates from around 1220. Why am I doing it? Not because I like heights – I can't assure you I don't! But to secure publicity & gain significant funds, to install under-floor heating, and to renew our Church, at the heart of our then local community, in Market Harborough & beyond.

+By the grace of God it worked, and when I moved here to St John's, in 2017 I left behind a thriving Church – with a congregation of around 100, at the heart of a vibrant local community, with a yearly Music Festival, a wide range of worship, community events + a weekly community café, that really did set that village aflame with God's love.

Leap of Faith no. 2, 'Leap of faith in Birstall, on the northern edge of Leicester'. I don't have a photo, but I do have this – a walking stick – relevant to my story. This Church, which I moved to in 2005, having served as Chaplain to Bishop of Leicester, was also ancient, dating from Saxon times, serving – in this case – a village of 15,000 people. +We realised we need to install a wood & glass screen, between our original Church, and its 1970s modern extension – for we were full on a Sunday – in order to initiative mid-week (& Sunday) church & community events, at the back of Church, at a time when the Village Hall was closing. So, what did we do?

We walked, together, 70 miles, through open countryside to Lincoln Cathedral, in the Diocese to which – when established – our Church then belonged. The result? Amazing. Our village loved it. An ecumenical pilgrimage, over 7 days, involving church & village members, from 7 to 70, walking 70 miles (not all of it, I hasten to add – only a few us of did that; we hired the Scouts minibus, to bring us back each evening). But yes, like in Great Bowden, some years later, we raised £10,000, thus enabling God's transforming work – on our building – to be completed, better equipping us to serve our local community.

Back to St John's, and were there more time, I could share with you in detail the Leap of faith, here, that happened in the 1980s, when our Church Hall, on the corner of Blinco Grove & Baldock Way had to be sold, and funds were raised to build our fantastic Community Rooms. Or, much more recently in 2019, I could have shared – thanks to some of you here – the story of 'Enlarging our Tent', and how funds were sacrificially raised, and grants secured, to extend our Community facilities, to make them more open & accessible, and even better equipped to serve our local community.

+Look at the amazing result, such that – not only on Sunday, but during the week & at weekends, St John's Church & Centre is literally humming with activity: whether it's Guides & Brownies, yoga, kids & toddler groups, courses, concerts, community lunches, the list goes on. +All because of our willingness to respond to God's invitation to live generously, to share what we have with each other (whether time, talents or money), and to reach out, with God's love for all people. A ongoing Leap of Faith with truly transforming potential, for the good of all, whether long-term residents, students, health workers, new arrivals or folks passing through: it's all here, in Hills Road!

Our readings today, in brief – from Isaiah 35, Luke 10 and 2 Corinthians 8 –

present us, on this Gift Day, also the Feast Day of St Luke the physician & evangelist – with great promises of God, with good news of a commission to share in the work of Christ; and it's a vision which turns, in practical terms (as we've already seen) on the invitation to live generously & sacrificially, as Paul encourages the Corinthians to do so, following the example of the Macedonian Church, and – in this case – in support of the suffering saints in Jerusalem.

+It's this invitation, I suggest, which calls us too, as the early Christians & countless other since, rose to the challenge, to a great Leap of Faith, in order to meet our Gift Day Challenge, here at St John's, in 2026.

So, again v briefly, the context. Just over a month ago, on 13th September, we had a special Service of the Word, to launch 'Powering our Future' (copies at the back), our long-term energy & fundraising strategy, linked to serious work that is going on to equip St John's to work towards NetZero, and, in the immediate term to install a new 'three phase' electricity supply, so we can continue to heat our Church, during the winter months, in order to go on serving our community - & witnessing to God's love – in transforming ways.

+Putting it simply, as our Gift Day Letter explains ((& if you haven't seen it or received it, do pick up a copy from the back of Church)), and aided by the Aviva Communities Fund, which is matching fund our donations – in the period until 19th November (so you've only got one month) – up to £250 per donor, we are, this year, raising funds (with a target of £20k) to secure our energy supply. In order that our mission here can continue, supporting our overall Vision & work of seeking to be 'A transforming Christian presence in South Cambridge', welcoming, proclaiming, nurturing, serving & transforming, for the good of the Church, of our Parish & of all God's creation.

For the point St Paul makes, in our reading and its sequel in 2 Corinthians, is that God invites all of us – mindful of the vision of his Kingdom, on earth, as in heaven; a kingdom in which 'waters break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert' – to give generously (whatever our means); for those who sow generously, will also reap generously, in God's economy: whether it's be nickel or a gold bullion. '*For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ',* Paul concludes, '*that though he was rich yet for [our] sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.'*

So thank you for all your great generosity; for your trust, as we seek to make a further Leap of Faith, here at St John's, for the furtherance of God's Kingdom.

Please do read and respond, if you're able to, to our Gift Day Letter and Challenge; and if you, yourself, are in need of support, please do let me know, because we all here for each other, whether it's the offering of our time, talents or money, for the upbuilding of God's Church, for the good of our community & Parish + for the healing & flourishing of human society & God's good creation.

+Let me end with another, very short, apocryphal story, as the baton is handed over to us…

'When Jesus had finished his work on earth and arrived at the door of heaven, the angel Gabriel met him. "Lord" said Gabriel, "is it permitted to ask what plans you have made for carrying on your work on earth." "I've chosen a few men and women" said Jesus, "They will pass on my message to the whole world." "But" said the angel, "what if these people fail you. What's plan B?" Jesus smiled, "I have no plan B. I love them, and I trust them!"

So be it Lord, in this place, and may your name be glorified - in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen