

Exploring generous worship for local preachers' meetings



AGENEROUSLIFE

A Generous Life says:

As a discipleship movement shaped for mission, we are engaging with our generous God to: give more time, give more money, know more of what we are doing and can do to change the world.

- **Question** (10 minutes)

Can you recall a strikingly extravagant act of worship from a different tradition to your own? Or can you recall an occasion in worship when someone opened themselves in a strikingly generous way to God? What was the effect on the rest of the worship? How did you feel?

- **Going deeper** (5 minutes, if time permits)

How can we shape worship differently to reflect more on God's generosity to us?

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2 Chronicles 5:1-14

Thus all the work that Solomon did for the house of the Lord was finished. Solomon brought in the things that his father David had dedicated, and stored the silver, the gold, and all the vessels in the treasuries of the house of God.

Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the people of Israel, in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Zion. And all the Israelites assembled before the king at the festival that is in the seventh month. And all the elders of Israel came, and the Levites carried the ark. So they brought up the ark, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up. King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who had assembled before him, were before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be numbered or counted. Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim made a covering above the ark and its poles. The poles were so

long that the ends of the poles were seen from the holy place in front of the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside; they are there to this day. There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets that Moses put there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the people of Israel after they came out of Egypt.

Now when the priests came out of the holy place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without regard to their divisions), all the levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, their sons and kindred, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with one hundred and twenty priests who were trumpeters, it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the Lord, 'For he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever', the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.

(NRSV)

Bible study

In the passage overleaf, the narrator explains the work involved in constructing the temple, and King Solomon dedicates the completed temple to God. Read through the passage and reflect on the following questions:

- How are the preparations for worship done?
- Who is included?
- What is expected to happen?
- What actually happens?
- Who is generous in this story?
- What are the lessons for us as preachers/leaders of worship?
- How do we build in expectations of God's extravagant response to us?
- How prepared are we for God to change the rules?
- How do we respond when it happens?
- Do we expect the unexpected often enough?

Connecting to generous worship

Discuss how 'generous worship' shows itself in the following stories

• Story 1

Bill has been a member of his local church for 46 years and loves liturgical worship. He also values harmony singing for the hymns and the organ accompaniment. As part of a drive to involve a wider range of families the church agrees to have a monthly café service led by a worship band with coffee available throughout. Bill immediately goes to the minister and says: "If you'll pardon the pun, this isn't my cup of tea at all but could I head the welcome team? The possibility of seeing our church come alive again is too precious for us to lose." What can Bill's generosity say to the local church?

• Story 2

Kath, a local preacher, and Des, a worship leader, are both in their twenties and part of a vibrant Methodist Church which has started to attract increasing numbers of teenagers. They approach the minister and offer to commit themselves to lead a youth service every Sunday at the same time as evening worship. How does generosity show itself here?

• Story 3

A struggling society on a housing estate is finding it almost impossible to keep their Sunday worship going. The church council approaches a thriving suburban church and asks them for support "in a spirit of connexional generosity". What response might be offered?

Closing questions

How can we as preachers and worship leaders use these stories and the Bible passage? Encourage a conversation between each other about what generosity in worship is. Is it God being generous to us? Is it our giving of our whole selves: heart, soul, mind, strength, movement, stillness, voices, listening? Is it in giving way to others? Is it in allowing space for God to do the unexpected – to open our wallets as well as our hearts?

Does worship change what happens the rest of the week? Share stories about how we take the sermons, songs and our worship into our everyday experiences.

Pray

- For people to be honest with each other, not ignoring some of the sharper issues that may have been raised.
- For the churches where people will lead worship during the next week.
- For the worshipping communities where being generous in worship is a challenge.