

I am going to tell you 3 stories of generosity that were really important to me

One Christmas when I was around 12 or 13 our family didn't have enough money to have a Christmas dinner. I remember my mum and dad explaining to me and my sister and brothers that Christmas that year would be different, but then a few days later people from church turned up at our house unexpectedly, with a massive food hamper full of everything we'd need. I remember thinking it was amazing to be loved that much.

When I was 16 I was doing my math GCSE exam, and I was really worried because no matter how hard I tried I couldn't get my head around fractions, I didn't (and still don't if I'm honest) understand how I was supposed to simplify them, or multiply them, or use them at all. My younger brother Paul who is 4 years younger than me and a bit of a math wiz and loved all that stuff.

I remember the night before my exam, my 12 year old brother sitting down with me and explaining how to answer the practice questions. We worked for ages- he gave up so much of his time, and I passed my exam.

I remember thinking it was amazing to be loved that much.

When I was 18 my mum got really sick, she needed a big operation and I was really upset about it. You know how sometimes when you're really upset you carry all the bad and sad feelings around with you everywhere and then all of a sudden they explode everywhere, well I went to school and got into a fight with my best friend and the upset exploded out of me and I said lots of horrible things to her and made her cry. I felt really bad and went home and was even more upset then I was before. But my friend phoned me- she said that she knew that I was really upset about my mum, and that she wasn't angry that I'd said all the horrible things and that she still really wanted to be friends. I remember thinking it was amazing to be loved that much.

Generosity is when we are giving with our money and our stuff, like the food hamper, when we are giving with our time, like when Paul helped me pass math, and when we are generous with each other, remember that we're only human and mess up sometimes like my friend who forgave me quickly.

It is in those moments that we take on the attitude of Christ, being a servant to others.

I feel really proud and privileged to be part of a church that has such an amazing history of generosity to the people in its community. There's a passion here for loving and serving people, for being Christ like that I love. We see it in the Manna, we see it in Urban Hope, we see it in the serving of first Sunday breakfast and in the musicians group, and the PCC and the Sunday school team and in the nativity play and every time anyone joins in. People giving more than they have to, to bless and love others.

And I am proud of you, of us because I know that it's not always easy to keep being generous, sometimes you don't feel like sharing your stuff, sometimes you don't want to give any more time, sometimes people are too mean or too annoying to want to forgive

Sometimes it is more tempting to sit and grumble and moan, or hide away and just not participate, than to work out what it means to be Christ-like here and now.

So for those times here is some encouragement-

Yesterday I learnt that the brightest star we can see at night is called Sirius. The coolest thing (I think) about the Sirius star is that it's so far away from earth that the light takes 4 years to travel from it to our eyes. Which means every time you look at it you're looking at light from 4 years ago, and that even if the Sirius star goes out- we will still get to see it for 4 years after it's gone. Isn't that cool?

On Wednesday afternoon after the Manna main session, and when most other people had gone, one of the people who come to the Manna mopped the floor. When I saw that act of generosity, I saw a light that shone like a star, and just like star light, just because I saw it last Wednesday afternoon- doesn't mean that that was when it started.

That light arrived in our halls 25 years ago when the Manna first opened, but goes back through the people who loved us, and Jesus before, all the way to the biggest act of generosity the world has ever seen, Jesus son of God coming to earth to die for us on the cross.

Every act of generosity we do- big or small- every time we give money or share our chips with our sister, or make a cup of tea, or take time to help someone move, or cook a dinner, every time we remember that the person in front of us is just human, we are adding to a light that will shine way beyond us, and sharing in the biggest act of generosity the world has ever seen.

Keep being generous St Stephen's, be Christ like and shine like a star- join in with a story thousands of years old and shine long after we're gone.