



4. A Passion to serve others (Luke 10:1-12; Mark 9:35-37)

Mark 9:35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." 36 He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

"If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

We have been exploring a series called Heart of Service over the last few weeks. We saw that at the very heart of service that we have a Lord who did not come to be served but to serve to give His life a ransom for many". We saw also that as human beings we were created to serve and as we see how Jesus served us in His death on the cross, our desire should be to serve our Saviour. And as we serve Him we see that service involves obedience and we are called to serve with the same heart as His. Our desire should be to serve His purposes and His purpose on this earth is the redemption of lost people.

Matt 28:18 "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

We saw last time how Jesus served His disciples in the most menial task and the command that went out to us was *John 13: 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. He serves us – now we serve one another.*

But we know that this command stretches beyond the household of faith. As we read in Mark 9 this morning we had this command *"If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."* I hope that you will recall the first item in the series where we reflected on the fact that the disciples saw greatness in terms of power and authority. It is amazing how Jesus turns human logic on its head and says that true greatness is found in service. One could argue that the all in Mark 9 is in relation to the other disciples, but as we look the gospels we see Jesus meeting the needs of ordinary people: the deaf, blind, lame, demon-possessed. Their physical transformation led to a spiritual one as He served their needs. And the Lord's greatest act of service was to die for each one of us – each man and woman on this planet. *For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many.*

Think carefully this morning of the most godly person you have ever met. What were they like (or are they like). I suspect that the person you think of will be a person that shows the care of Christ in their lives, irrespective of who they are dealing with. They are people that don't just speak Christ, but live Christ. And how is Christ-likeness expressed? *"If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."* He's the One who did not come to be served buy to serve and give His live a ransom for many.

Do we want to be a church of note? That is: do we want to be a church that is great in the eyes of God? Then it is in the quality of who we are. For many churches and many Christians individually, we stress how important belief is. We take pride in calling ourselves "evangelicals", "Bible believing" or perhaps "Spirit-filled". As a church we take pride in our evangelical tradition and our Statement of Faith. We know who we are and where we are going. We are the sons and daughters of the most high God, we have a Saviour, Redeemer and Lord, Jesus Christ. Great, super, fabulous. But if we're all that then we need to live Christ and that will reflect in our love and care for one another and our love and care for the lost! That means serving one another and serving the lost in such a way as they find Christ. Because that's exactly what Jesus did because that's what He's like!

And we are called to be like Him and been given His Spirit to make that all a reality in our lives.

Let's try to be practical this morning. How may serving the lost actually bring them to Christ? Let's resort to scripture and to the sending of the seventy (or seventy two) in Luke 10.

"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' 6 If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. 7 Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. 8 "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. 9 Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.'

These disciples went from town to town. They were coming to bring good news and as travelling preachers it was the custom of those days for people to give them hospitality. We are disciples that bring good news. People are a little less welcoming these days!! But here are some principles as we seek to serve others – because that's what these disciples did.

◆ Bring Peace

Do we want to reach those in our community who don't know Christ? Then we need to be people who are at peace with them. *"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.'* Being at peace means just that. They weren't to check whether they lived lives that were godly and acceptable. Just that they accepted your peace. Part of our religious culture is to cut ourselves off from those people we regard as "sinners". We all do it. We don't want to become associated with certain kinds of people because we regard them as beneath us. What did Jesus do – he ate with tax gatherers and "sinners". Why? Because He came to rescue them. So where's your problem? Where's mine? It's not our job to judge – just to show them peace and share the message of love, forgiveness, transformation and acceptance that comes in trusting Christ.

◆ Start where they are

Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. These were travelling preachers. They didn't hand out tracts and say "come to the synagogue and hear us". They met them at home and found acceptance in their environment. Our Christian faith is a personal one and is found in friendship in the environments where we meet non-Christians – as neighbours, part of a club, at work and the like. The world has changed. People rarely enter churches today. To them, church is a place of fear, or weirdos, or irrelevant. Yet they hunger and thirst after something, We have those words of life and we can share them. Why don't we? This year we have started two "Life Groups". They have been set up in two neighbourhoods and their purpose is to create a friendly house group environment where it is possible to invite interested non-Christians who would not at this point be seen dead in a church – not even for their funeral!

◆ Be prepared to persevere

7 Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. Stick with that house. Pray and ask God "Who have you given me to witness to?" It will be obvious and you are likely to be the only Christian some of your neighbours and friends will ever meet. But be prepared to persevere. Pray daily for them and their households. Offer to pray for them if they share problems with you. Show them friendship. And if they don't seem receptive, keep on praying and asking God to give you opportunities. Remember that all the people that God put on the heart of George Muller, but two of them didn't accept Christ until a while after he died!

◆ Meet felt needs

This is the serve bit. You can't avoid it. If you are involved with people, you have to get your hands dirty at some point. Jesus did – so will you if you seek to follow in His footsteps: *Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.'* There it is – heal the sick and tell them. It was a practical thing. They showed their love and care by dealing with their felt needs. It is the lost message of the gospel. If you have words of life for people, then they are more acceptable in an environment of love. In fact, one of the biggest criticisms of Christians is that we have all the words, but our lives don't show it – we're not different or distinctive. In fact I suspect that most people see us as no different to anyone else. If we don't exude anything special or different, why should they find what we say worthwhile or attractive? Many non-Christians just see us as frauds.

One of the things that has characterised much of the gospel preaching in recent years is the disconnection between practical service and the gospel. It was not so in the nineteenth

century where churches saw the practical care of the community as part of its ministry – helping the poor, education, health care, rights – all were things that God's people initiated and operated in. Some of our greatest campaigners for social justice were prominent Christians: Elizabeth Fry, Lord Shaftesbury, William Wilberforce, William Booth, even Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Unfortunately, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the idea of the social gospel was thought up by liberal Christians. Churches got involved in all sorts of social action but unfortunately they got more preoccupied with that than with Christ. Once you lose the focus of Jesus, you lose the plot!

Worse was to come because evangelicals, having realised that the plot was lost then wrote practical action out of their agenda as being liberal and we just preached the gospel to people who would listen – and often we did not deal with the issues which were the barriers to them coming to Christ. We left all the social stuff to the government. Have you ever tried doing social action with out Christ?

But actually what I'm saying here is that it is our acts of love and kindness as believers that show Christ as we meet people's needs. And we don't have to be a multi-million pound governemnt department to do it. It's that small act of service that makes all the difference - doing our sick neighbour's shopping, mowing their lawn, cutting their hedges, checking on them when they are ill, taking them to the doctor.

As a church our action needn't be dramatic wither. We already have Steve and Janice doing the Warehouse, we have Mother and Toddler but as we seek to reach out to families or to strangers in our town there are many simple practical things we can do to help people using our experience and facilities. It needn't cost much either. It's a case of helping people where they are.

◆ Speak good news

And why do we do that? Because people have true need. It's a desperate need. They need to know Jesus. That's our purpose as believers and as a church. As we live the love of Christ, we can speak the love of Christ because people will be ready to hear about the love that they have seen demonstrated. In fact, without the two together, in our unchurched world of today, we are unlikely to see conversions. People need to see God at work, not just hear a load of words. And where do they see the love of Christ? In our care and our meeting felt needs however small. And where do they see the power of Christ? In prayers offered and answered. And where do they see the presence of Christ? In us.

But we must end up speaking the gospel. The warehouse, mother and toddler, family events, English lessons or whatever are no good unless ultimately they lead people to Christ. They are sowing events and God wants us to reap them. The main reason for people not responding to activities that bring in people from outside church is that we never reap what is sown. They come and they go. We build friendships but unless Jesus and introducing them to Jesus is the core reason for them; then they will be as unproductive as they usually are. Learn from Luke 10. part of what we will do in the coming year is to help whoever is interested to get the focus right and show how we can translate trying to live as Christ into speaking Him.

This is not the social gospel we're talking about here – it's the only Gospel and it's what Jesus did! In a world that does not know Jesus, the only way they will see Him is in us. How did Jesus prove He was the Christ? Read through John's gospel in one sitting sometime. It has a series of incidents that showed Jesus was the Christ – things He did and most were acts of service and kindness that led to belief.

Steve Sjogren conducted a "Free Lawn Care" outreach. He loaded a mower and rake into a truck and drove around until he saw long grass. He approached the house and knocked on the door to tell the owner what he was up to. Through the screen door a man barked, "What do you want?" Steve gave him a brief explanation and, without even looking up, the man's response was simply, "Yeah, whatever...."

The man sat motionless in front of the TV, watching a Reds baseball game. Steve mowed enthusiastically - he sometimes calls it "power mowing" – and finished in about 30 minutes. When he stopped by to tell the man it was done, Steve asked if he could pray for any needs in the man's life. He said he didn't have any needs. As Steve began to walk away, he felt sure this man had some emotional need and that he ought to insist on praying for him. Steve turned around and prayed, "Come, Holy Spirit, and touch this man's pain, whatever it is." The response was instant and surprising - the man erupted in deep sobbing that continued for some time. As the crying died down,

he told Steve his son had been arrested the night before for stealing a car in order to support a drug habit. That day God's presence and power penetrated this man's pain and isolation in a tangible way - because a Christian was willing to cut a little grass.

At age 79, the atheist and famous journalist Malcolm Muggeridge found the Lord. Asked to explain his conversion, Muggeridge said he could resist all the great books and all the great sermons. But when he saw Mother Teresa in Calcutta with the poor, he said, "If this is it, I've got to have it!"

As we go further into another year, we need to understand that we are people that are called to make a difference in Swaffham. It is not the difference of grand schemes and huge evangelistic projects. It starts by us caring enough about people who are lost; people who are heading for hell; to start praying for them, to start sharing with them the love of Christ in little ways that shows them Christ in us – you'll find speaking the kingdom will follow as we persevere. That's how people become Christians.

As you know, I have a burden to reach families. Most in Swaffham are unchurched. They know nothing of faith. Our words make very little impact. What does? The presence and the power of God? And how are they going to experience the presence and power of God? They've got to see it in us. They've got to see it in our actions. They've got to see it in our prayers. Then the words we speak will mean something and out will come the harvest!

Prayers:

- repentance
- empowerment
- to be burdened for our friends and neighbours
- burden for the community
- willingness to persevere
- readiness to speak good news.

"If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many.

