

## **Knowing, Showing, and Sharing God's love**

### **Worship Pt 1**

Over Lent our sermons are going to look in much more depth than we have done before, at the three areas of our parish mission statement, those 3 areas being Knowing, Showing and Sharing God's love. But before we get on to today's topic, I just want to give you a bit of background about how we ended up with our mission statement and what's behind it. The mission statement we have ended up with, and diagram to go with it, didn't just pop out of someone's head, I'm certainly not that clever to think it up on my own. But it came over a long period of time from lots of thoughts, ideas and prayer from many people, in what we believed God was saying to us as a Christian community, represented by you, our churches here in Oakworth and Newsholme.

If you look at the diagram, those parts of Knowing, Showing and Sharing are underpinned by 3 very well known basic Christian principles of Worship, Fellowship and Discipleship. Now, on their own worship, fellowship and discipleship mean very little to people outside the church, so we needed to express those 3 principles in ways which people could understand, and in a way which we can also easily remember, hence the strap line, knowing, showing and sharing God's love. The diagram does its

best to try and represent what it means to live out the Christian life.

To be a Christian you need to have God at the centre of your life, that's what we live for. A life lived for God, is a life which brings glory to God. Jesus honoured God by fulfilling his purpose on earth. We, honour God the same way, we bring glory to God when we fulfil the purpose for which we were created. St Irenaeus said "The glory of God is a human being fully alive!" There are many ways to bring glory to God, but they can be summarised in these 3 basic principles of worship, fellowship and discipleship. All 3 interconnected, all 3 inseparable from one another, all 3 with God at the centre, and all 3 needed in equal measure to live a life which glorifies God.

### **Worship**

So, let's think about worship. We bring glory to God by worshipping him. Worship is a Christian's first and primary responsibility to God. We worship God by Knowing him, and by enjoying him. But worship is much more than praising, singing and praying to God. Worship is far more than turning up for church for an hour on a Sunday morning. Worship is a lifestyle of enjoying God, of loving him, of having a relationship with him, and of giving of ourselves to be used for his purposes. When

you use your life for God's glory, everything you do can become an act of worship. Bryony said last week that we are shaped by the things that influence us and that is certainly true about worship. If we are in tune with God, if we put God at the centre of our lives by knowing him and worshipping him, then we are more likely to be shaped by him through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Surrender**

Glorifying God and living a life of worship more often than not requires us to change our priorities, our schedules, our relationships and everything else. It will sometimes mean choosing a difficult path instead of an easy one because living a life in worship to God means making the sacrifice of our self. It means sacrificing our own self-control and surrendering to God's will. At the heart of worship is surrender and surrender is an unpopular word, disliked almost as much as the word *submission*. It implies losing, and no one wants to be a loser. Surrendering evokes unpleasant images of admitting defeat in battle, forfeiting a game, or yielding to a stronger opponent. The word is nearly always used in a negative context. The captured criminals surrender to the authorities.

In today's competitive culture we are taught never to give up and never to give in - that's almost always the theme of our school assemblies - we hardly ever hear about surrendering or even coming second. If winning is everything, surrendering is unthinkable. We would rather talk about winning, succeeding, overcoming, and conquering than yielding, submitting obeying and surrendering. But surrendering to God is the heart of worship. It is the natural response to God's amazing love and mercy. We give ourselves to him, not out of fear or sense of duty, but in love, because he first loved us.

### **Vicar**

I've often been asked, "What made you decide to become a vicar?" And it's always a really difficult question to answer, simply because people often can't get to grips with this idea of surrendering ourselves to God. People see it as a career decision, a job that you aspire to and somehow decide would be a good career move. Yes, long before I became a vicar, I do remember surrendering myself to God and in all sincerity praying one of the hardest prayers I have ever prayed, which went something like this; "Lord take me as I am and do with me whatever you will." But that was the only decision I ever made, because at that point I had no idea God had some crazy plan to bring me to this point standing in front of you all, wearing a back

to front collar and a ladies dress. In praying that prayer 20 years ago I had absolutely no intention of become a vicar, I never wanted to become a vicar, it had never even crossed my mind, in fact I laughed hysterically when the wife of our curate suggested it to me and told her not to be so ridiculous. So, there was never a decision to become a vicar, the only decision I have ever made was to be totally obedient in my surrendering to God and remain faithful to his leading. And here I am, 20 something years on, and I still wouldn't choose to be a vicar and wear ladies dresses in public, yet the calling remains the same, because it continues to be my natural response to worship and commitment to God's amazing love. That doesn't make me better than anybody else, I still really do struggle with submission and in surrendering to God.

### **Submission**

Yet the offering yourself to God in submission is what worship is all about. This is what Jesus was talking about in our Gospel reading when the teacher of the Law asked him which was the greatest commandment, and he summed it up in this way. *"The greatest commandment is this: The Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. And the second commandment is this: Love your neighbour as you love*

*yourself. There are no other greater commandments than these."*

Now, if these are the only two commandments which really matter, I think we are already struggling... OK God, I think I can just about love my neighbour... Well that is apart from that low life who broke in to my shed and stole my bicycle and lawnmower. Oh and there's the person up the street who keeps parking across my drive, but apart from them I think I can love my neighbour. Well, that is apart from that taxi driver who pulled out in front of me in Keighley on Friday, and the miserable woman who was really nasty to me at work the other day, and the idiot who nearly knocked me over on his bicycle, probably the one he nicked from my shed. Apart from them Lord, I can just about love my neighbour...

And of course I really do love you Lord with all my heart, soul, mind and strength... But Lord I'm not sure I can really afford to give a tithe of my income, will 10% of what's left do?

Yes, I do love you Lord, but I'm really tired, it was a late night and besides I went to church last week.

Yes, I do love you Lord, but right at this moment I haven't got time to read my Bible, I'm already late for my Zumba class.

Yes, I do love you Lord, but my faith is a private matter and my family and friends really don't need me to tell them about you.

## **Excuses**

This is really demanding stuff. To be honest we've all used those excuses, we all struggle with truly worshipping God, because in giving up what we want to do, in surrendering ourselves to God completely, it requires a great sacrifice. Yet this is what Paul says in Romans 12:1 when he urges us to fully surrender our lives to God in worship. *"Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer."* True worship - pleasing to God - happens when you give yourself completely to God as a living sacrifice. Notice the first and last words of that quote are the same: 'offer'. We 'offer' ourselves to God in worship. After communion near the end of our service we usually say this prayer together before going back out in to the world...

We thank you for feeding us with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.

Through him we offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice.

Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.

Offering ourselves as a living sacrifice to God is what true worship is all about, but the act of offering ourselves will always require the response to be from us. God doesn't command us to

give ourselves to him, he doesn't make us worship him, he doesn't force us to love him. Love doesn't work by having power over someone else, love is always mutual and reciprocal, it is always respectful and beneficial. Yet true love is always demanding because it means we always have to put the other first before ourselves.

## **Stops**

So, what stops us from surrendering to God, what stops us from submitting to him, what stops us from giving him our all? Well there are three barriers that block our total surrender to God: fear, pride and confusion. We don't realise how much God loves us, we want to remain in control of our own lives, and we truly misunderstand the meaning of surrender.

Trust is an essential ingredient to surrender. You won't surrender to God unless you trust him, but you can't trust him until you know him better. The more you realise God loves you the easier it is to surrender. But how do you get to know God? How do you get to trust him? And how do we know that he loves us? Well remember which part of our mission statement we are looking at KNOWING. To know God is to love him. To know God is to trust him. To know God is to be loved by him. And for us to know God in that way we must have a living relationship

with him and the only way we can ever have a living relationship with him is to read and study our Bibles, and to see him reflected through the life and ministry of Jesus. I will always say, if you don't read your Bible regularly you will never truly know God. Yes that can be demanding when we don't have time, but that's the beginning of being a living sacrifice, the start of surrendering... knowing God. If God is going to do his deepest work in you, it always begins with knowing him more.

So, give yourself to knowing God. Give him your past regrets, your present problems, your future ambitions, your fears, your dreams, your weaknesses, your habits, hurts and your hang-ups. Trust in him and put Jesus in the driving seat of your life, take your hands off the steering wheel, your foot off the brake and enjoy the ride. Don't be fearful; nothing under his control is ever out of control. You will certainly never have any regrets from Knowing God more, from worshipping more and from surrendering to God more.