

Colossians 3:12-17

Luke 22:24-27

Showing

warmer in worship

This morning we have what is the second offering of the second part of the three- part theme of our church mission statement, Knowing Showing and Sharing God's love.

And if that hasn't confused you, just give me time, I probably soon will.

John and Philip here at Christ Church and Sharon, I believe at Newsholme, spoke about the Knowing part of the mission statement – of how our relationship with God is demonstrated as we live out our daily life in worship. And if you haven't already looked at Sharon's sermon on the Web site I would recommend that you do so, it's very interesting and helpful.

Last week Bryony, you will remember, spoke how we show the love of God through our relationships, which have evolved during our worshipping together as family, in both practical ways and through emotional support. And this week I have the task of unpacking that showing section of the statement a bit more.

All these sermons are on the web site.

Paul wrote this letter to the Colossian church from his prison in Rome because he knew there was false teaching being accepted in the church there.

I understand that Paul had never ever visited the church in Colossae. The church had been founded by converts from one of his missionary travels on the basis of his teaching about Jesus.

However, the church had been infiltrated by some believers who held views that... differed from his slightly, shall we say.

They were attempting to combine some pagan beliefs and some secular philosophies with Christian doctrine.

And, actually, that does happen to an extent today.

I was a bit surprised to learn that some Druids and New Age followers consider themselves Christian, as opposed to pagan, whilst still following some of the philosophies of the pagan religions.

The definition of pagan is someone holding religious beliefs other than those of the main world religions, especially nature worship.

But Paul says – hang on, that’s not right, you can’t do that!!!

And he emphasises the Christian understanding that he teaches, that Jesus Christ is the visual image of the invisible

God and the head of God's church – and so it is his teaching that Christian believers should be following – not to be diluted by any other teaching – even though other teachings may appear to be more attractive, in the short term.

Because let's face it, verse 12 is not easy sometimes. V12 Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tender hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. You must make allowances for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends.

*Because God chose us to be holy people whom he loves.*

And it's that word love that undergirds all of Jesus teaching – God's love.

Because we belong to a Christian church we do acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the head – every week we acknowledge this. And our understanding is that we are called to be his body on earth and in order to even be able to begin to demonstrate that in the community we have to begin by learning how to demonstrate that to and with each other.

As children learn how to relate to the outside world through family influences, so we learn through the influences we absorb from in our church family.

And we have to learn that it's important to learn trust, to allow ourselves to be vulnerable in front of each other – as we did as children in the families we were born into.

And that our church family is there to support and love us through the ups and downs of life – *no matter what*.

In order for us as a church family to be able to do that we have to acknowledge that we all fall short of what Paul says we must do as Christians but that God is still there to love and support us – *no matter what*.

Accepting that we all – all of us – no exceptions - fall short is the first step towards achieving that peace and harmony that Paul says is the fruit of the love of God that binds us all together.

And we all struggle with different things from that list that Paul gives:

Tender hearted mercy,  
Kindness,  
Humility,  
Gentleness,  
Patience.

Do you recognise anything on that list that causes you to stumble sometimes?

Well, I recognise one or two but the biggest stumbling block for me has always been and still is, humility.

As a new Christian I was encouraged to seek God's direction for my life.

I came to faith in an evangelical, charismatic church and at that time it was understood that God calls you for a purpose, a practical purpose.

I think at that time most evangelicals were modelled on Martha – there didn't seem to be many Marys that I met anyway.

I was told He will have a task for you. Pray about it.

For some years I prayed, what is it you want me to do.

As I say it was a charismatic church in worship – so lots of ministry times, prophecy, healings looked for, words of knowledge, people speaking out in tongues..

And so, my imagination, as you can imagine, ran riot.

I thought that I was being called to be a healer, a great healer, not just any old healer, and in my mind's eye I was on a stage in a conference hall laying hands on people as they were miraculously healed.

I devoured books by John Wimber and similar ministers. John Wimber founded the Vinyard church and wrote and spoke on the work of the Holy Spirit through signs and wonders.

It was all very exciting.

Eventually however, I began to realise that God didn't seem to be very eager to start me on this ministry.

And so I again began to pray. Lord, what is it that you want me to do – and then, eventually, one day I got an answer. As I was praying I got a picture in my mind's eye of some words –

I have only ever had two pictures given to me and this was one of them. The second one.

And the words were not exactly what I was expecting or hoping for – they said

To serve, the highest call of all.

They weren't big dramatic words – they were small and very neat.

And me being me, immediately rushed off to offer to do all sorts of tasks that in my mind were covered by the word service.

I think I even offered to clean the toilets in the church hall – being given due praise of course, but, someone had got there before me, and she wasn't looking for praise.

And it was a long time before I understood what service means in God's family.

Luke explains what Jesus means as service:

Luke 22:24

Then they began to argue among themselves about who would be the greatest among them. <sup>25</sup> Jesus told them, "In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people, yet they are called 'friends of the people.'<sup>26</sup> But among you it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant. <sup>27</sup> Who is more important, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? The one who sits at the table, of course. But not here! For I am among you as one who serves.

I think service means the offering of our life to be changed in order to worship him fully – it means to put away any idea of self-importance – of being more important than anyone else

It means accepting people and their challenging ways – and being thankful when they accept us and our challenging ways.

As we all understand, I think, we are all part of the body of Christ and so we are family, we are one body and, as in any family we all have differing gifts and skills – and serving means being willing to offer those gifts to benefit others – offering them in love - even when it costs us to do that. And I do see many examples of that service being manifested in relationships within this church family.

And I am aware that caring for each other does go on in the background with no fuss being made.

I have ended up as an ordained minister – standing up to speak this morning as I have many times in the past 18 years as both Reader and priest.

I can't say that I had a call to the priesthood –or to preach - I had a call to serve and this is just one of the ways that has worked out.

I would not have willingly chosen this – over the years this ministry has cost me in energy, emotional and physical – but it has also rewarded me.

I remember feeling guilty because I had enjoyed preaching my first sermon and my vicar of the time telling me I was supposed to enjoy it – that was a confirmation I was in the right place.

I was amazed, for some reason I thought that if God had called you to a task you would struggle with it.

In John's sermon he spoke about submission and surrendering your daily life to God and how that isn't easy because it does entail sacrifice.

But I know you will agree that there is nothing to compare with the sense of peace that comes once we are given the courage to pray, yes Lord, your will be done.

I think in my mind, as a healer the ministry would have all been God's – I would just have basked in reflected glory. Not a lot of sacrifice there then!

But this ministry entails offering myself and being vulnerable, being prepared to be challenged in what I offer...when I have misunderstood...as I often do.

Wondering how much is of me and how much is of God?

Being open to being told – I disagree with what you said.  
Because we all have a right to say that.

When I am too old to preach anymore, the call will not lessen – because the call was not to preach but to serve, and that call will remain deep in all of us, no matter how our life circumstances alter.

God has placed me in two loving families during my Christian journey, firstly St George's and now here.

And that is the joy of belonging to a church family, we can be ourselves, warts and all, make mistakes, and still be loved and accepted because we are *all* held safely in God's love. And if we ever doubt that love we just need to look at Jesus and what he gave for all of us, and others, in terms of emotional, physical and spiritual pain.

Philip said in his sermon, Jesus loved meeting with his friends. When we make time to meet with him, either in a group or individually it makes him happy.

In the reading from Luke, Jesus' ministry on earth was drawing to a close. Three years of making a special

relationship with the disciples in preparation for what was to come.

He makes a shocking statement that one of these “special” friends is going to betray him to the authorities.

They began to wonder who it would be and that led on to a corporate boasting session!

They began squabbling about who deserved the greatest honour.

After three years of concentrated teaching about loving service and sacrifice and rejection they were asking for honour, recognition and power ...they just hadn't got it!!

I think that, like me, they had a problem with humility!

To serve means being willing to give of all that we are for each other because we love God and he loves us – as individuals and as a whole. To be committed to one another in his name.

Bryony said to us last week, your presence here makes us whole. When you are not here, we are no longer whole, there is something missing – you!

Though we are many,  
We are one body.

Not completely whole of course, we are part of a much wider family, because the church of Jesus is not simply here in Christ Church in Oakworth, the church of Jesus is a world-wide church – but we are called to live as an example of

commitment and love to the part of the world we find ourselves in.

John 13:34

So now I am giving you a new commandment: love each other.

Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.

Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

Amen.

