

Why do we do what we do?

Last time I spoke I suggested that one of the factors driving what we do for others is Love and in fact, last week Anne asked the question, as a question she had been asked, “[did] I believe that God was the source of love that prompted or encouraged people to serve those in need”. Today's reading from Philippians today helps us to dig a bit deeper into why we do what we do. It gives both positive drivers, those that we strive to get closer to, as well as negative drivers, that we need to try to avoid.

I'm going to start today with the negative driver, something that we should be striving to avoid as we go through our lives. That reason is personal gain. If we are prompted by love to serve people, then we have to avoid looking for personal gain through what we are doing. Paul puts it this way, “Don't do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast”. However it's often easier said than done.

Saying that though, we as a church, in both congregations, are actually pretty good at it. Just think about all the jobs that are done, in the background, that don't give the doer much in the way of recognition. All the people from our congregation that keep our church buildings clean and in one piece. Those that ensure we always have enough communion wafers or clean cloths. At Christ Church, those that wash and dry the mugs after coffee each week, or who ensure that there is coffee to be had. The list goes on; musicians, prayers, readers, flowers, organisers. All these people that provide services for others but who obviously don't do it for a desire to boast since, quite honestly, how often are they actually recognised and thanked. I do want to say Thank you to everyone that gives to keep our churches going in whatever way.

However, we do have to watch ourselves, particularly those that are “up front” and visible to make sure that we are not doing it for ourselves. How easy it would be as a leader/preacher to find, however we started, that we are looking for some sort of personal gain. Being praised for how we are able to lead people in worship. People saying how wonderful your sermon was. You just have to look at some of the more extreme tele-evangelists that you see in America to see how if you are not careful, serving your congregation through preaching can become seeing how many people you can get tuning in and donating. It becomes about how good you are rather than how well you can help others.

So please can I encourage you, as you pray for the church, please pray that it's leaders, global and local, will stay focused on service and will be able to avoid working for selfish ambition.

So what are the positive drivers that we see? The first is that we are called to look out for one another's interests. Or, as Anne put it last week, we are to serve those in need. Our calling is one of service, a path of sacrifice. If we see people that are in need that we can help, how can we claim to love them if we avoid helping them? If members of our congregation are struggling and we ignore them, how is that showing love?

Then, just to make sure that we get the picture, Paul shows us exactly how this can be done by showing us an example of someone that fulfilled this requirement, Jesus.

Jesus had every right to expect people to worship him, he is, after all, God! The angels would bow before him, he had everything. Despite that, he knew that humans needed saving and that he needed to be the one to do that saving. In order to carry out that service to humanity, he became one of us. He came, not as a prince, ruler or business owner, but as a manual labourer. He came not looking for crowds of adoring fans but for what he could do for the lost individuals, those the crowds ignored and reviled. Finally he accepted the ultimate in betrayal, sold to those that wanted to kill him for a month's wages. Even during the suffering of his crucifixion he was focussed on

helping others, the thief on the cross and his mother being the most obvious ones.

Jesus therefore gives us the perfect example of humble service but, that's not where Paul finishes his thoughts. "For this reason God raised him to the highest place above and gave him the name that is greater than any other name. And so, in honour of the name of Jesus all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below will fall on their knees, and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (9-11)

Jesus did not come to earth looking for adoration and personal glory, but that did not mean that he didn't receive anything. God is a just judge and part of judgement, as we see on shows like *Strictly Come Dancing*, is to give praise for the good. Jesus served without expectation of reward but he still received it.

I said earlier that it's easy as a preacher to preach looking for affirmation through the praises of the congregation. While I try not to do that, it doesn't mean it doesn't happen. It is however a blessing when it happens, often for some reason on those sermons I wasn't particularly happy with.

We should not be looking for personal recognition or reward when we are working for others, but that doesn't mean we won't receive any. Also Jesus says, in Matthew 10, "You can be sure that whoever gives even a drink of cold water to one of the least of these my followers because he is my follower, will certainly receive a reward." (v42). We may not be rewarded in our lives here on earth, but the just judge will reward.

Finally, a word of encouragement when it all feels like too much. Our reading finishes with this promise. "God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey his own purpose" (13). We are not asked to do this by ourselves, God is with us through it all, often through our fellow Christians, giving support, encouragement and strength to do whatever he has called us to do.