

Recorded for online service

Also at Christ Church Oakworth on 1st November 2020.

Matthew 5:1-12. 1 John 3:1-3

Lord, may we continue to grow as your spiritual children, to mature in your spiritual blessings.

Amen

Practicalities – a very human trait

Before I began attending Christ Church, or indeed any church service regularly, I knew nothing of the practicalities of going to the front of a church to receive communion, let alone why I should. I had never done it or even taken much notice of other people doing it. I certainly didn't know why people did it or what they 'got out' of it.

Yet on one occasion, at Christ Church, I had the unexpected and strong thought of 'maybe I should get up for communion'.

It was as uncomfortable a feeling as when I had to move to another city with my family, and so, as a child, I didn't know my way around the new school, or any of the teachers or pupils there. It wasn't yet 'my' school.

Everyone else knew what they were doing, where they were going. I had no choice but to just get through each day clinging to the hope that it was leading me one step closer to being more comfortable and more familiarised, to fit in, to finally blend quietly unnoticed amongst the crowd.

I was at Christ Church amongst loved ones, at a family marriage blessing. I was there simply because I had a heartfelt love for them, and so had a deeper, natural longing to witness their happiness and to receive the absolute privilege of sharing it with them.

Reason enough to be willing to put my own lack of faith or comfort zones aside, even to say religious words I did not understand, to not feel in the slightest hypocritical.

It was simply faith and trust in the love I had in my heart for my loved ones that had brought us together to God's church that day. No other criteria needed.

Consumer Faith

At the marriage blessing, I made the bold choice to get up and join the queue to the unknown of communion. I just simply did it, as a receiver, a consumer. As I sat down afterwards, my Uncle asked me "do you *feel* better for that?" My instant reply was "yes".

If anyone were to ask me why, I could not have given them an answer then. I was like a baby in my relationship with God. But unbeknown to me, I had followed God's call. Whether a relationship grew from that was my choice.

Earthly growing children

We learn to be self-serving consumers from the start. As babies we soon learn to scream, some of us all night long, to get what we want, and as immediately as possible. It is all we know how to do. We are blissfully unaware of our reliance on others for the grace, mercy, peace, care and love, that we need to thrive, let alone the minimum requirements of food and shelter resources to keep us alive and well physically.

We are all aware of people who do not receive that at all in life as well as people who aren't able to give that either.

So, having to learn as we grow up, that we are expected to give back to others, just as we have received, out of love, takes much more effort. We know what it feels like to be 'forced' into having to share a much-valued toy with anyone else.

We see only the selfish risk of a potential loss, or breakage of something we value. The criteria list as to why we deserve it more than others and to protect it for ourselves starts early. So does the wrestle with our parents or guardians.

We don't yet have the knowledge of why we should have to trust others anyway, we haven't 'done' the years of committed time or maturity yet to fully understand that it is simply the right thing to do. The questions of why, don't become clearer for years!

We grow up physically and mentally through years of life experiences, especially those times where the mistakes of other people as well as our own have chipped away at us, leaving scars.

That is when we bring out our lists of criteria of deservedness towards others. They become the excuses to not be so confessing of our sins, so forgiving of others, so meek, so merciful, so pure of heart. They become reason enough for us to go against others who do bring those blessings to others, even at great cost to themselves.

Spiritually growing children

I am sure you can see the analogy and metaphors here that are so much like our journeys in getting to know God. From knowing nothing, to knowing him through Jesus Christ, to transforming our hearts, to feeling emotionally effected by the ultimate sacrifice he made on our behalf. To approaching him with love for him in our hearts and minds. To recognising the Holy Spirit in our lives as both comforter and challenger. To growing up spiritually.

To today, the realisation that we must still be children in infancy, because we have yet to fully realise those beatitude blessings that Jesus is so lavishly pouring out.

Whatever we are today, inwardly in our hearts and minds, we bring it to God anew, just like the children that we are in his sight.

Our 1st reading today from 1 John, chapter 3, verses 1-3.

See how much the Father has loved us! His love is so great that we are called God's children – and so, in fact, we are. This is why the world does not know us: it has not known God. My dear friends, we are now God's children, but it is not yet clear what we shall become. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is. Everyone who has this hope in Christ keeps himself pure, just as Christ is pure.

Spiritualities – a very Jesus trait

The beatitudes are challenging because they not only remind us of where we have not adhered to them, but also they make us feel like we did when we tried to avoid simply sharing, or giving as immature infants, yet we should be mature enough to know simply that it is just the gracious, righteous thing to do.

God reminds us that these blessings are to be lavishly poured out to those, who in our world, are judged, questioned, suspected, mistrusted, powerless or even completely ignored. In God's

Kingdom they are at the top of the list. Imagine having nothing but physical thirst and hunger so that it is all you can think about. That is the kind of thirst and hunger God is challenging us to in putting his will, and others first.

Thank God we have a time of Confession, we really need it, every day!

We are reminded to bring our hearts back to Jesus, to being Jesus like. To 'be' peace, not just to be 'at peace' for ourselves.

If Jesus left out of it any list of criteria of deservedness for anyone to feel that the Kingdom of heaven is near and a reality to God's will being done, on earth as it is in heaven, then we are to strive to do so.

Jesus is often described as being meek and mild, yet he showed the opposite with boldness and strength when he saw peoples suffering and acted to ease it, even when the religious authorities backed him into a corner. He healed a man on the Sabbath.

He left any criteria of deservedness out of it when he gave the Samaritan woman at the well his time, enough for her to confess all that she was in her heart and soul, confessing her sin. She faced Jesus in poverty of spirit. This led to her being able to boldly witness to the very community that had shunned, judged and gossiped about her, just what a blessing it is to be transformed by the grace of God.

Jesus turns our criteria of deservedness for people receiving invite and acceptance into God's Kingdom, completely on its head. A stark contrast to what we experience in our world as being deserved, powerful, successful, and most important.

Free School Meals Campaign

These past few weeks, someone decided to lead a call, to give a simple and clear message: "no child should go hungry".

Thousands of people who were in any position to do so, quickly followed the call. Did something about it. They found a way to feed hungry children. Simple as that.

Since then, people have done what worldly humans are conditioned, often encouraged to do, discussed, judged, got out the criteria list of deservedness. Thousands of ifs and buts. It takes far longer to do that, than it does to meet someone's need.

In this case, thousands responded to the need first. No criteria.

Once our hearts have been transformed in the knowledge of God's love for us and we have committed the time to feel a genuine love for him too, the challenging question then is, who are we to deny anyone else that same good news?

We are to give it, share it, be it.

Amen