

Transformative power of service (w/c 24 March 2019)

“Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.” (Martin Luther King)

As with our consideration of simplicity last week, service is again more about an approach, a state of mind – it's not a set of targets to get stuff done. The Bible contains many passages that encompass teaching on service. How do we balance the injunctions about keeping it all quiet in **Matthew 6:1-4** with the very public areas of service announced by Isaiah and acknowledged by Jesus? See **Luke 4:14-19**. To what extent has there been an overemphasis on Matthew 6:1 which has kept Christians from public service?

In comparing 'self-righteous' and 'true' service, Richard Foster outlines how we are aiming for an approach and attitude where we:

- Give to all; not just those 'worthy' of help
- Keep going whether we feel like it or not
- Build community through quiet caring, not looking for headlines or applause

Which element of these do you find hardest to match? It is also important that true service is always for its own sake – there can be no hidden agendas. How do we discipline ourselves to ensure that in giving we don't place obligations on the recipient?

In *Murder in the Cathedral*, TS Eliot describes the response of Thomas à Becket to his final temptation in these words, *“The last temptation is the greatest treason; to do the right deed for the wrong reason”*. Does this help you understand the approach you must take?

Thinking more widely; how far have we seen the very concept of *service* undermined in what has happened in recent years, for instance, in much of the 'care' industry with tick-boxes and a profit motive replacing a caring attitude? To what extent does this lead to problems in the very way that we all think of those around us who are in need? What can we do about this to protect the weak and vulnerable in society and ensure that they receive the services they need and still feel valued?

Read **John 13: 2-5 and 12-17** – how does Jesus attitude encapsulate all that we might want to bring to a life of service?

Think of one thing you could do... On a practical note: how well do you know those living around you? What are their needs? Or perhaps, you could think about volunteering within the local or wider community: there are many opportunities out there and the evidence seems to show that it will benefit you as well as those you help, as volunteers are more connected, less stressed, healthier, happier and more confident.

“The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’ But...the good Samaritan reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’” (Martin Luther King)