

Not to be served, but to serve.
Luke 5:1-11 / Luke 22:24-30

What comes to mind when you think of a servant?

Many of you will be devotees to Downton Abbey which portrays a very clear division between those upstairs and those downstairs, between servant and master.

I have to say I thought of Jeeves and Wooster where the lines are deliberate blurred. Jeeves is very clearly the master of the situation however much Bertie Wooster refers to himself as the young master.

Our second reading today reveals that Jesus had to work hard to get across the true nature of the calling his disciples were to follow, that of servant.

The setting is just after the Last Supper and after Jesus says that one of the disciples will betray him.

Thrown into doubt and confusion the disciples start to question themselves and one another and the dispute escalates to who is the greatest.

"It can't possibly be me, I wouldn't betray him. I'm one of the three he takes with him on special occasions!"

One thing leads to another and their insecurity and competitive nature emerges. Who is the greatest?

Remember, this is the occasion that Jesus washed the disciples feet so they are not grasping what he is trying to teach about being a servant.

He tells them, so these words are for us too – that we must be like the youngest and like a servant.

The youngest was someone with no status whatsoever. The servant is clearly less important than the one they are serving.

Jesus says – I am among you as one who serves.

I love the way that the lyric writers can capture our faith story in simple lines.

*From heaven you came helpless babe
Entered our world, your glory veiled
Not to be served but to serve
And give Your life that we might live*

Here before us is the Communion Table. Here we will re-enact the last supper and take bread and wine. The gospel writer Luke is speaking directly to the church in re-telling these things the way he does; when you come to remember, recollect the context and the instructions Jesus gave. We are to consider ourselves as of no status compared to others and to serve as he served. He gave his life...he invites us to do the same.

I think we have a very fine example of what Jesus was talking about. Today is the 70th anniversary of the Queens accession to the Monarchy.

No-one could be thought greater than Queen Elizabeth if it comes to status and yet throughout her life she has devoted herself to the service of our country.

In the Book of Common Prayer communion service we say the Collect for the Sovereign. Written at a time when the Monarch had

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astonishing status, power and authority, it nevertheless places the Monarch as someone who themselves are under authority.

and so rule the heart of thy chosen servant ELIZABETH, our Queen and Governor, that she (knowing whose minister she is) may above all things seek thy honour and glory:

You only have to listen to the Queen's Christmas Broadcasts to know that she knows whose minister she is and that she brings honour and glory to Jesus Christ.

And although the Queen clearly has status, she recognises her own need as she seeks to be faithful to her calling to serve. On her coronation day; June 2nd 1953 she said.

When I spoke to you last... I asked you all, whatever your religion, to pray for me on the day of my Coronation - to pray that God would give me wisdom and strength to carry out the promises that I should then be making... I have been uplifted and sustained by the knowledge that your thoughts and prayers were with me.

In those words we recognise her humility.

In Simon Peter's words there is more than humility, there is fear.

The Gospel set for today is the calling of the first disciples and it's a scene we know well.

Jesus is teaching from Simon's boat just a little way off shore. He then suggests Simon push out further and throw down the nets. The catch of fish is so vast he needs his partners James and John to help and even then both boats are nearly sinking.

Peter recognises Jesus holiness and his own sinfulness. Go away from me Lord. Jesus re-assures him and tells him his new mission will be to catch people.

When we usually think of catching people, it's either children playing the game catch, or catching someone out or even snaring someone against their will.

Bearing in mind they are in a boat full of fish they have just caught and the fish are all dying the idea of catching seems a little misplaced. Being caught against your will.

So I checked out the word for word translation from Greek,

And said to Simon – Jesus Fear thou not; from now men thou wilt be taking alive.

It subtly shifts the emphasis. This isn't catching as in catching someone out. It's catching them before they fall. It's keeping them alive. It's saving them from death.

In John's Gospel Jesus says "I have come that they may have life and to the full".

Peter's mission, the churches mission, is to experience that fullness of life and wherever and however possible share that life with those spiritually dying. It's to catch people before they fall.

As you know I am busy trying to complete all my visits concerning Transforming Trinity and each and every conversation is relevant and informative.

Not a single conversation has been self-indulgent by which I mean not once has anyone only been thinking about themselves or ourselves...just us.

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Whether it's the need for more toilets (which is a frequent topic!) or to be warmer, or whatever is said about the buildings, there is always that attitude of being there for others and welcoming to all and the desire that as many as possible might feel that they could be a part of the church life.

Not finding ways to catch people or trick them into attending ...but having the greatest possible capacity to catch those who are falling, save those who are stumbling and befriend those who are lost.

Transforming Trinity isn't the church's ego project to be a better place than other churches, or a self-indulgent project to satisfy our whims, but a recognition that we could be re-ordered, re-configured, recreated in order to facilitate our mission to share God's love.

What I've heard in so many different ways, is how we could be better equipped to serve. I think the Queen would approve. Perhaps I'll get her to come and re-open the church when it's done.

So how shall we respond to all this during the week to come.

I imagine everyone here will at some point serve someone else. It might be in practical ways. It might be emotional support or listening. It might be financial, most frequently it will be the very ordinary mundane things of the day. The washing. Ironing.

This can be elevated when offered as an act of worship. If you've never tried that it might seem odd, but everything and anything we do for the love of others and the love of God becomes an act of worship.

The second thing is how you pray for those not yet aware of the love and grace of God.

We can pray that a desire grows for a life that is deeper, richer and more fulfilling. A longing for more develops. Into that we can offer what we know, we can share God's love.

And in these ways we live faithfully. Faithful to our calling to serve as God is faithful to us.

Let us pray.

Rev. Jon Hutchinson, 6 February 2021