

May I speak in the name of the Living God, Father, Son, and Holy spirit.

Today during this service, we are focusing on Christian Service, and what it means to us. I must admit when I was asked to take this morning prayer service, I spent ages scratching my head, thinking what I could base the theme on.

I read the two readings for inspiration, but nothing happened, I prayed for guidance, but still there was no answer, and with little over a week away I had spent hours staring at a blank computer screen hoping that something would come to me.

In desperation I re-read the readings for the forty fifth time, and suddenly Isaiah 1 17 leaped off the page: *“learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”*

And just I was about to dismiss the idea making an excuse that it probably wasn't such a good idea, Isaiah 18 gave me clear instructions:

*“Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool”*

That absolutely struck me at the core of my being, the the Lord pre-empts my doubt and excuses and says directly to me *“Come now, let us argue it out”*.

I have to admit that this is something I wasn't that keen on, sure I've screamed at the Lord when I didn't understand,

I've argued that this was not meant for me to do, but ultimately I have come to understand that when the Lord prompts me to do something, it's probably best to get on with it, after all part of our Christian duty is service.

The next verse of Isaiah, 19 reads *“if you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land”*, so I accepted the Lords instructions and set about the task in hand.

Why is it that we often find excuses when it comes to serving the Lord, or doing things for the Church? Matthew 26 – 27 reminds us

*“whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave”*

Wouldn't it be marvellous if we put so much commitment and intensity into the Church and service as we do with sports and all our other pastime,

how many of us have become so wrapped up in our life's routine that we have no time for God at all, let alone service?

How many of us set aside Sunday morning for Church, believing that that is enough time for the Lord instead of involving him in all our life?

We can all be guilty of putting God into a box, and only opening it when it suits our needs. In times of sorrow, need, and want,

how many of us fail to thank God for the times which are mundane, or good in our lives? How many of us actually ask God how we can help to further his kingdom?

Instead we look to the world that defines greatness in terms of power, possessions, prestige, and position, the media feeds us daily with the idea that we must put ourselves first, and if there's nothing in it for us, what's the point? Acting as a servant is not a popular concept for us.

Jesus, however, measured greatness in terms of service, not status. God determines our goodness by how many people we serve, not how many people serve us.

This is so contrary to the world's idea of greatness that we have a hard time understanding it, much less practicing it.

The disciples argued about who deserved the most prominent position, and 2,000 years later, people still jockey for position and prominence.

In fact if we are asked to do just about anything for the Lord the excuses start. "I'm too busy, I'm already doing this, you probably need to get someone else because I can't commit to that"

I read a humorous story about some soldiers on furlough that I think illustrates this.

"The commanding officer was furious when nine soldiers who had been out on passes failed to show up for morning roll call.

Not until 7 p.m. did the first man straggle in. "I'm sorry, sir," the soldier explained, "but I had a date and lost track of time, and I missed the bus back.

Being determined to get in on time, I hired a cab. Halfway here, the cab broke down. I went to a farmhouse and persuaded the farmer to sell me a horse.

I was riding to camp when the animal fell over dead. I walked the last ten miles, and just got here."

Though sceptical, the Colonel let the young man off with a reprimand. However, after him, seven other stragglers in a row came in with the same story

-had a date, missed the bus, hired a cab, bought a horse, etc.

By the time the ninth man reported in, the colonel had grown weary of it. "Okay," he growled, "now what happened to you?"

"Sir, I had this date and missed the bus back, so I hired a cab." "Wait!" the colonel screeched at him. "don't tell me the cab broke down."

"No, sir," replied the soldier. "The cab didn't break down. It was just that there were so many dead horses in the road, we had trouble getting through." Excuses!

Sometimes our excuses hold us back from accomplishing anything for God.

How often do we use excuses in order to avoid serving others? How can we further Gods kingdom

God often tests our hearts by asking us to serve in ways we're not comfortable with, for my part I found it particularly difficult to be around children.

My wife and I had been trying to have children for over 10 years, we had been down every route to conceive, but sadly it didn't happen for us,

accepting the reality of the situation was one of the hardest things we have had to do, my hopes of being a father and Karen a wonderful mother were dashed.

In my previous job as a Police officer I had only experienced the worse of humanity when it came to dealing with children, so to say that I was uncomfortable when I was around them was an understatement.

But God spoke to my inner soul, he recognised the hurt that I had been carrying, and he prompted me to volunteer to take our Noah's Ark, parents and toddlers group leaders role,

you can imagine the inner turmoil I went through, I didn't want to accept this call, it brought all the hurtful memories back to the fore, but eventually, begrudgingly, I accepted the role which I have now been doing for over a year.

And its been inspirational for me, I have let go of the angst, my heart has started to heal, and I love being around the wonderful parents, volunteers, and toddlers now.

God truly does heal all wounds, and challenge us in our daily Christian life.

So I ask you all now, how can you help grow Gods kingdom?

Can you talk to your neighbour and offer to help in some way, can you set a good Christian example by the way you live your life for others,

can you pray for someone or the world, can you use your gift that God has given you for the good of others?

It doesn't have to be a big act, but perhaps in some cases it does?

Perhaps you could volunteer to help keep the Church café open, perhaps you could add your name to the cleaning roster,

the lay rota for readings, serving, or teas & coffees, perhaps God calls you for some other purpose, but unless we take the time to pray and listen, how are we ever going to know.

So today I have set up some prayer stations, and during the intercessions we are going to have some time to move around the church and pray for some guidance on how we are called to grow Gods kingdom.

Christ calls us to have the hearts of a servant, to listen to God and to obey, just as Abraham in our second reading obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance,

he set out ' Let us set out on our journey today, without excuses.

Amen