

Acts 2:42-47 & John 4:1-26

Slide one – church Image

This week begins a short Stewardship season during which we will have the Annual meeting and also consider three aspects of Stewardship – worship, service and finances. This week it's worship that is the focus.

Slide - What is Stewardship?

My ideas are formed from bible stories where the Steward is in charge of the Masters house and servants, fields and business. The Steward has the Masters authority and serves diligently to prosper the Master when absent.

The Steward has authority, acts responsibly and knows the Masters objectives.

When I think about a Stewardship season, it is that each of us should reflect on how we are doing as Stewards first and foremost of our own Spiritual lives. Rather than drift along, we have God given authority to take responsible decisions towards our spiritual lives...towards growing in faith, hope and love.

It can be tempting to offload the responsibility onto the church OR the Vicar. If your faith is in the doldrums it must be my fault!!!! But I come at Stewardship to make an invitation to every church member to take stock and reflect. How is my worship? Am I growing in Faith, Hope and Love?

To be fair, in most places, a Stewardship season is just another title for the Vicar preaching about money...and I have no embarrassment in doing so – but that is not our number one priority.

Slide – cart and horse

Stewardship should also include service, (our active response to the Gospel) but to put service or finance first is like this picture – the cart before the horse.

Erwin Lutzer said *"If we haven't learned to be worshippers, it doesn't really matter how well we do anything else"*.

The church is particularly guilty of muddying the water and making the priorities of the Christian Life all about the needs of the institution rather than Jesus Christ. When HE is not our number one priority – we've lost the plot.

Slide – this quote

Richard Foster says... *To worship is to experience reality, to touch life. It is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community. It is breaking into the glory of God, or better yet, being invaded by the glory of God.*

Our short reading from Acts is a wistful remembering of what the worshipping church was like at the beginning, a devotion to the Apostles teaching, fellowship and prayer, the experience of signs and wonders, corporate caring for each other needs. It all flows from our encounter, our proclamation and our worship of Jesus Christ.

Stewardship – 2018 - Worship.

In the Gospel story today, the woman at the well encounters Jesus Christ and is transformed.

Slide - picture

The encounter takes place at a well known geographical location and the opening lines indicate something odd; it would be strange for a woman to be drawing water at midday. We realise later why it is she is keeping herself to herself.

Bear in mind, this woman would have had no say whatsoever in her marriages or the divorces. I have no evidence for this, but I think she was most likely childless; children would have probably kept her in a marriage. This is not Elizabeth Taylor or Zsa Zsa Gabor clocking up husbands, diamonds and alimony, but someone who experience of life is painful and bruising and she either keeps away from her neighbours or they ostracise her...that is, until she encounters Jesus.

Jesus is always working towards our freedom and the wholeness of our Souls. He wants us to be in the same loving relationship with God the Father as he is. He hasn't got long to have a conversation with this woman and I think he is well aware of the things he later reveals as he starts a conversation.

To begin with it's about having a drink and a spring of living water welling up within (I haven't time to go into that in depth) and then Jesus just goes for it – he dives straight in – go call your husband.

I have no husband.

You are right in saying you have no husband, for you have had five husbands and the guy your are with now, your not married.

There it all is in a sentence, her life story summed up! The very things that make her keep herself to herself simply said in one sentence.

The revelation that Jesus is a prophet (at the very least) prompts a further discussion about worship and Jesus says

Slide Quote

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

It's not about a geographical place.
It's not about this form of worship or that form of worship but worshipping in spirit and truth.

What matters is the inner response of our spirit (our Soul) to God and the form of worship is only relevant insofar as it aids us in expressing ourselves. Our three services are a step towards providing forms of worship to aid us in our response to God.

As our relationship with Christ develops, so our spirit responds with love, loyalty, obedience and devotion. We grow in faith, hope and love.

But we must also worship in truth.

Stewardship – 2018 - Worship.

In our liturgy we say....*Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden.*

It's US who shy away from our own stories and heartaches. Like the woman at the well we hide from the truth but nothing in our lives is a surprise to God and it's the damage to our souls he longs to heal.

Here is a wonderful thing. The woman has been keeping her distance from her neighbours, but she is so excited at meeting Jesus she runs to call on her neighbours and the way she gets them to come and see Jesus is to refer to her own story – the very story that led to shame and separation.

Quote

"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!"

Worship must flow from our soul, our spirit and we must also live in the truth, the truth of who we are, and who Jesus is.

Just as an aside, the Samaritans only accepted the first five books of the bible. No Psalms. No Isaiah or other prophecy. Their understanding was extremely limited so their concept of the truth was limited. We are to be people who explore our faith and learn and increase our understanding.

So to Stewardship. We take stock of the basics.

Slide – areas to address...

How regularly do you have the experience of Jesus speaking into your life?

Am you reading God's Word and in doing so, growing in your understanding of truth? Does it inform and prompt your worship?

How am you doing at prayer?

What level of commitment do you have towards the service that helps you worship?

Taking a lead from the reading in Acts, are you in fellowship with other believers?

Our eucharist liturgy says
*It is indeed right
It is our duty and our joy
At all times and in all places
To give you thanks and praise.*

Has your spiritual life become more duty and less joy?

And how are you doing at giving thanks?

Slide quote

Charles Swindoll said "We are often so caught up in our activities that we tend to worship our work, work at our play and play at our worship".

Stewardship is an opportunity to redress the balance but that might well mean giving something up to make worship a priority.

Stewardship – 2018 - Worship.

Towards the end of our short Stewardship series I will be handing out a booklet of ideas on all three topics and there may be things there you wish to respond to.

One simple one is bible reading. If we read the scripture for next Sunday through the week, we would come better prepared, but that's just one simple idea.

I know Katherine is developing an idea for a prayer gathering at church, and we already have a prayer day on May 10th, but it might be personal prayer you wish to develop.

I've just returned from 48 hours at Spring Harvest and will be attending New Wine in August. It might be that a retreat, or conference, or study course would be right for you.

The question I would ask today would be this, what one thing would you like to develop that will aid you in your spiritual life and thus your worship?

Please do share these thoughts with me – there's no point me creating ideas about prayer if it's bible reading, or about bible reading if it's prayer.

Alongside the question what one thing, what would you be willing to give up to make the space and time to devote to your faith and worship?

Silence

Worship – constantly giving God our expression of love thanks and praise and proving it by our instant joyful and complete obedience.