

Later in this service we shall sing a well-known hymn.

*Brother, Sister let me serve you
let me be as Christ to you.
Pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.*

In this short Stewardship season I'm preaching about three areas of our lives over which we should exercise authority and discipline. Rather than drift along, Stewardship allows us to take stock and reflect on how we live out our faith.

On week one I preached about Worship. Last week was the Annual meeting – a time to reflect on where we are up to as a church. This week it's our service for Christ and next week will be about financial giving.

The opening verse of the hymn captures the heart of it nicely. The assumption is that we serve in order to be like Christ.

And we would only want to be like Christ if we've met him and experienced ourselves his love and grace.

We meet him through reading God's word, he becomes alive to us. We experience Christ through His Spirit sent to us – the Spirit giving us the inner prompting, understanding, truth and joy.

When we begin to understand what Christ has done for us and we experience the freedom that is ours through faith, the most natural thing in the world is that this

makes a difference to our outlook and activity – we look for ways to serve.

At least – that's the theory, but obviously it doesn't quite work out that way in practice.

Our reading from James is typical of James who is a younger brother of Jesus. James led the church in Jerusalem.

The letter of James isn't long, 5 chapters, but it pulls no punches. His style is direct and to the point. He is writing to the church, which was still predominantly Jewish Christians.

Show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by what I do.

He's not saying that deeds / good works / our actions are enough to save us. We can only be saved by faith in Jesus Christ.

But if we have faith in Jesus Christ and it's genuine – it will show itself through deeds and actions. The most natural outworking of faith, are worship, service and giving.

Do you remember the snatch of song I played on Easter Day?

Eliza Doolittle is sick of Professor Higgins and all his many words – and sick that young Freddy only has words for her as well, lovely though romantic poetry can be...

Words Words Words
I'm so sick of words

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I get words all day through
First from him, now from you
Is that all you blighters can do
Don't talk of stars
Burning above
If you're in love
Show me

Tell me no dreams
Filled with desire
If you're on fire
Show me

He we are together
In the middle of the night
Don't talk of spring
Just hold me tight

Anyone who's ever been
In love'll tell you that
This is no time
For a chat

It's a very funny person who can fall in love and not want to show it!!

I married a couple some years ago and the Groom was a very shy fellow. The idea of standing at the front of church in front of everyone was agony for him – but he was in love and wanted to be married. As I went through the service with them both I said...now at this point, that's when you get to kiss the bride.

He looked at Kirsty his Fiancé and said, "how about a nice firm handshake at that point?"

Ever since then I've told the groom that at the point in the service where I declare them husband and wife the bride needs to be kissed and if he doesn't I will.

Love that is only words is not as complete as it is when accompanied by actions!

God is love

Out of love God sends his son.

Out of love Christ give his life.

Out of love we are set free.

Love is the gift being given and the most natural response to this love is worship, service and giving.

James challenged those Jewish Christians who (I think) had replaced a slavish adherence to the Law, with a narrow experience of academic faith. Head knowledge. But James says...if you think it can all just be in your head, then I'm sorry that faith is dead.

I can imagine James thinking about his older brother and wondering how on earth anyone can ignore how active and compassionate Jesus was. How his whole ministry was service to others.

But he's not ignoring the other extreme swing of pendulum.

If one extreme is faith and nothing beside....the other is good works – as if those alone can save. Neither is possible. True faith manifests itself in loving service.

D. Elton Trueblood (what a name!!) said

Service without devotion is rootless;
Devotion without service is fruitless.

Very neat.

When thinking about our service and practical involvement in the world because of our love for Christ, a passage from Philippians often comes to my mind.

Paul says IF.....it's a big IF.

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IF – you have experienced

if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

If you haven't experienced those things...clearly you haven't experienced Jesus Christ and then why on earth would you bother about worship, service and giving???

To use the same way of speaking as Paul I would say...

IF – you have experienced, encouragement, comfort, love, the Spirit, tenderness, compassion – then find ways of sharing that with others through what you do.

Of course on a Sunday when preaching about serving Christ it is very very tempting to give the impression that it's only when we serve Christ in and through church that it really qualifies.

I DO want people to serve Christ in Church – there's a lot being done and needs doing – but it's vital we serve Christ in a whole host of others ways and places.

School Governors – that is a tremendous area to serve. Supporting and working in charities and organisations. Offering practical support and emotional support outside this building and our church organisations.

When I publish the list of opportunities there are to serve Christ inevitably I'm going to be focused on Holy Trinity, but please don't think I don't value what you do in other places and other organisations.

It's not where you serve that matters, it's why.
Why should we serve?

It's the most natural response to the love of Christ.

Some years ago Katherine and I saw the film "Pay it Forward". A High School teacher sets his class an ethical task. What would they invent or suggest that could change the whole world.

One little boy has a simple idea. He will do three acts of random kindness to others that are costly, but instead of expecting some reciprocal reward, he will ask these people to pay it forward – to each do three acts of kindness to others.

If three acts of kindness becomes 9 acts of kindness and they become 27 acts of kindness and they become 81 and so on eventually the whole world will have been offered kindness and changed.

Jesus isn't here.

We cannot befriend him as John did.

We cannot anoint his feet as Mary did.

We cannot cook him a meal as Martha did.

We can't long to show him our wobbly faith by jumping out of a boat like Peter did.

What Jesus wants in response to his love is for us to pay it forward, as it says in the Hymn.

Brother Sister let me serve you,
Let me be as Christ to you.

I don't want anyone to feel guilty, or feel they ought to do something or must do something...lets come at this from an attitude of love. Because God has loved me and I've experienced that love...how best can I show it elsewhere?

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Amen.