

Some years back it was reported in the press that buses from Hanley to Bagnell in Staffordshire no longer stopped to pick up passengers. The situation came to light when one passenger complained that buses on the outward journey regularly sailed past queues of people. A Councillor then made transport history by stating that if these buses stopped to pick up passengers they would disrupt the timetable.

That made the news because what was expected of the buses was not what was happening.

As we think of our Queen today on her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations we recognise that she has and does serve this nation with humility and grace and that in a sense doesn't make the news. It is what we might expect and she does it. However, as this little book 'The Servant Queen and the King she serves' points out, what is of importance is why she serves with such humility and constancy and what we can learn from her example.

The main thing we learn is that her life is based upon Jesus, which we seem to see increasingly in her Christmas broadcasts.

In her 2000 Christmas broadcast she said, "For me, the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to live my life."

And it seems that it is especially Jesus example of service and teaching on service that she finds helpful.

In her Christmas broadcast in 2012 she said ""This is the time of the year when we remember that God sent his only Son 'to serve not to be served'. He restored love and service to the centre of our lives In the person of Jesus Christ. It is my prayer this Christmas Day that his example and teaching will continue to bring people together to give the best of themselves in the service of others."

It is known that, apart from the accounts of Jesus' birth, the passage she most refers to is the parable of the Good Samaritan. In her Christmas broadcast in 1985 she said, "The story of the Good Samaritan reminds us of our duty to our neighbour. We should try to follow Christ's clear instruction at the end of that story: 'Go do thou likewise.'

Today as we reflect on 'Living a life of service' let's see what Jesus has to say about it, how he lived it and what we might learn from that.

### **1. a key story**

The parable of the Good Samaritan is probably one of the best known parables and I'm not going to go through it now but just raise one point from it.

Here was a man who was attacked, beaten and robbed. He was left for dead beside the road.

What did the man need? He needed help.

Then Jesus told of three people who came along. The first man didn't help. Let's not get too judgemental because those listening didn't. They understood the many reasons which would have stopped him helping.

In part it would be true to say he didn't help because well the injured man wasn't known to him. He wasn't a friend.

The second man didn't help because well the man was in such a mess.

The third man looked at the injured man. He saw he didn't know him. He wasn't a friend and he was from a different people, a different group but the wounded man needed help so who he was and where he came from didn't matter, which is the point of the parable. The question Jesus was answering was, "who is my neighbour?"

Our natural inclination is to help those close to us, those we know, those who help us. But those we don't know, well that is a different ball game and as for helping our enemies well that is asking too much isn't it?

But that is what Jesus was saying. Love shown in acts of kindness should know no bounds.

Jesus point could be summed up as 'let's not ask who the man in need is but what does he need?' It is an attitude of being willing to help no matter who it is that needs the help.

## **2. What Jesus had to say about service**

In that second reading we are presented with a very human situation. We see James and John looking for positions of power. They were 'jockeying for position'.

Jesus teaches these disciples a very different way as we see from v42-45.

He got the 12 around him and then spelt it out to them, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you" (Mark 10:42-43). "Not so with you". The way of the disciple is to be different to the rest of the world. They were not to be looking for position and power.

Jesus gave his disciples, and remember we are his disciples, a different pattern. It was a pattern that he followed and which our Queen has followed too.

The disciples came wanting places of power. That is what most people want and in a sense what our Queen has. Jesus words were "not so with you".

We are not to lord it over people. I love the fact that apparently when The Queen is at Sandringham she will sometimes drive herself to church and sneak in at a side door and sit not in the pew only she can use, but in one of the pews at the front. Just another member of the congregation, not lording it. If position and power is not the way, if we hear the words of Jesus "not so with you", then what is the way? How should we as followers of Jesus live?

Well Jesus spelt out a very different way for his disciples, "Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all" (Mark 10:43-44).

Here is that very different way. The way of service. Who is great in the kingdom of God? It is the one who is prepared to serve.

This is of course what Jesus himself did as we see in that reading, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many." Mark 10:45. Jesus came to serve and he served sacrificing his own life. There is no greater service than that.

This should be our pattern as we follow Jesus the pattern of humble service, of sacrificial service such as the Samaritan did.

The Christian life is a life of service. I think it is in this that the Queen stands out and I think it is this that has made her so popular in the nation. On her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday she made a radio broadcast in which she said, "I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great Imperial family to which we all belong."

A life devoted to service and, as she has shown down the many years since, that is exactly what she has done, following the pattern of Jesus and setting an example to us.

It seems that the so called 'service industry' is getting serious about wanting to serve?

May till receipts ask the question "how did we do today"? Last Christmas at Tesco the staff wore T-shirts with the words "Need help? Let us know. Let us know. Let us know" on. The aim is service and the aim for the Christian is service. It is not a case of am I better than you? Am I greater than you but how can I serve you?

So do we need a change of attitude? Do we need to be learning how to focus on the needs of others and how we might help and serve them rather than being concerned with our own needs? Do we need to learn to be putting others before ourselves? This leads us to our third point for this morning,

### **3 So what about us?**

Well as the Queen put it, ""The story of the Good Samaritan reminds us of our duty to our neighbour. We should try to follow Christ's clear instruction at the end of that story: 'Go do thou likewise.'

But how practically do we do that?

I think it must begin in prayer. Our daily prayer should be that God our Father would give us the servant heart of Jesus. But more that God our Father would open our eyes to see the opportunities to serve.

I don't whether you have noticed that we just don't see things and then if someone points them out we seem to see them everywhere. The other day I was walking with my granddaughter and we

noticed some purple flowers growing out of a wall on her street. Having noticed them we saw that there were lots of places with them and when we got back to their house there were the same purple flowers by their front door. I hadn't noticed them before! We just need the eyes to see. We need the eyes to see the opportunities to serve others.

Here is the starting point that, in our walk with Jesus, we are being changed from self to serve and that we are having our eyes opened to see as God sees.

But then of course it is not enough to see the opportunity to serve, we also need to be ready to act.

I remember one evening when I was living in Eynsham I was walking through the village to go to a meeting. I was with a friend and we were talking. We saw across the road someone lying on the floor and two people with them. The friend asked if we should go and help. I thought not as well there were people there already. So we walked on. Later that evening someone arrived for the meeting quite late and apologised that she had seen someone lying on the floor and gone across to help. Given that she had not been there when I passed I felt bad that she had acted where I had excused myself from acting.

If we can see the need then, like the Good Samaritan, we should be willing to act.

It doesn't have to be big things that we help people with. It doesn't have to be difficult or messy but we have to begin to stop making excuses as to why we cannot serve and why we cannot help.

And here I am not just talking about helping people who have fallen over or need some shopping done but am addressing the opportunity to serve in its widest sense and that includes helping and serving in the life of our church.

I was talking with a couple of clergy a few weeks back and mentioned that we here at Christ Church are suddenly facing a number of areas where we need help. We need people who will serve in the crèche, in children's work and youth work. We need help up there in the gallery and many other places. I mentioned to my friends that we had never had a situation like this and one said, "then you are about 10 years behind the rest of the church." I think it is a sad indictment upon us and our discipleship that we are struggling in so many areas and I simply place this before us this morning and ask are we serving or are we wanting to be served? May the words of Jesus and the example of our Queen stir us to reflect upon our own lives and having asked God for the servant heart and asked God to help us see where the need is to then be willing to respond to the need as God shows us.

