

Living it out (Application):

Last week's question: How have you had to deal with stress recently? What helped you take it to the Lord?

This week: What gifts do you have? What is God prompting you to do with them?

Coming Up at St Mark's

Marksman Breakfast Saturday 15th June, 8am. "Faith in a Prison" with Andrew Georgiou, Chaplain at Wetherby YO1. Coffee and bacon served.

Wine tasting evening at St Mark's...eight fine wines, £10 a head, proceeds to Tearfund. Friday 21st June, 7.30pm. Please book through the office.

Andy's ordination...Just to flag up, Andy P will be ordained a priest at 9.15 service on 30th June and celebrate communion at 11.15 that day..

Date for your diary. **Church hog roast and summer celebration**, for all the family...keep lunchtime on Sunday 14th July.



Please pray for...

Give thanks for **helpers** at our **9.15 Xcel** groups after last week's appeal. More still needed, particularly at LOL. Please pray for more workers for this brilliant work discipling young people. .

Pray for **Susie and Grace Hart** in Iringa, making a film about Neema Crafts. Pray for protection and vision. Pray also for Andy and Rosie at home.

Pray for **Martin Ainsworth**, media director for Youth for Christ, who is sharing with us this Sunday.

Pray for **Andy and Claire**, as he gets ready to be ordained priest at the end of June.

Pray for our **confirmation candidates** Alison Taylor, Rachel Hayes, Megan Watts, Greg Webber, Gemma Finan, Jack Kennell, Sam Gumbley, Toby Donegan-Cross, Oliver Brook.

Continue to pray for **Andrea, David, Stephen, Ruth and Paul** – for God's grace and presence in their lives.

Mission Partner Focus:

Pray for the **IF campaign**, after this weekend's demonstrations – calling on world leaders to end extreme poverty and hunger.

Thank you for your prayers for this church community!

This Sunday there will be an opportunity for folk to write any questions relating to future plans on a slip of paper. We will seek to answer through video/open meeting. Please do take this opportunity!

INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week beginning: 9th June 2019

Worship/reflection:

On Youtube find "Strategy 4 Releasing Gifts", where Dan talks about our plans for recognizing and developing gifts in the church community. Spend time thanking God for the gifts He has given you.

Vision without action is a daydream: Releasing Gifts

We do not need, as a church, to get out in the community. We are out in the community. St Mark's is in the schools, in the hospitals, in the businesses, in the neighbourhoods. Between us we are very busy getting alongside 1000s of people in Harrogate. And we are busy – we do not necessarily need more activity. But what we do need is to be using the gifts God has given us to be His kingdom people.

When Jesus was walking around His body was in **one** place, at **one** time. But when He ascended we read how He "spread out his gifts", equipping His church to be His body on earth at **all times** and in **all places**. You are **the body of Christ**. But when Jesus said we were his body, what did he think that would look like? And where do you fit in? **As Christ's body on earth, we have a mission. And you are part of it. Our vision as a church is that we can equip each other, as we meet, to be sent out, to see the kingdom. A key part of our purpose is that we spend our energy on allowing God to release the gifts in us, and equip us to serve Him. That's what church is about. Church community is like a battery that charges you up, a wisdom school, a training centre. A place where we "inspire each other, to love and follow Jesus Christ, everywhere in everything." Hey, that sounds familiar.**

So as we look at our plans for releasing gifts and building up the church, it's really important that each of us has an ear to hear where God is calling us to belong, and how He is calling us to operate as the body of Christ. Here is a key point: **one of the concerns raised has been that in seeking to appoint more people to leadership roles, and appoint a "Releasing Gifts Director" for example, is that it will "de-skill" the body.** But, while that is a genuine concern, that is the opposite of what the plans are about. Just to warn you this rest sermon will contain Hong Kong flats, a barcode, a walking ear, and a crashing plane. I want to address some common reasons as to why we can resist being part of the body of Christ or to be growing in our gifts. Things like, "I can be a Christian on my own". "I am not needed." "I am too damaged." Or "I don't know how to."

I can do it on my own. People frequently say this in our culture. Spirituality is about me. I don't need to be joined to others. I don't like "organized" religion. I have my own spirituality. On the surface, there is something appealing and peaceful about this. But you don't have to scratch at it for long to see how tragic it is. It's like a block of flats where people live alongside each other, in their own worlds, but can't connect. **The far more wonderful fact is that to belong to Christ is to belong to His body.** As we read "there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. To do anything in the Kingdom **is always to do it with other people.** That is why Jesus sent two disciples to fetch a donkey. You would think that fetching a donkey would not be too complicated. But Jesus was so committed to the idea of community that **He joined people together for even the simplest of tasks.**

When people say, "But I don't like organised religion," I always feel like asking, "Well, do you really like disorganised religion?" What they are really meaning is, "**I don't like community.**" Because any group of people that are joined together in community will need to be organized in some way, as they share life and gifts. Fundamentally, being part of a church is not about benefiting you. **It is not individualistic.** It is about benefiting others. It is a community where we **give ourselves to each other to equip the saints.** Where we need each other. The tragic thing when people say, "I can do it on my own," is that the underlying idea is that **salvation or relationship with God is just a barcode on their forehead - an individual mark which gets them "through". My own personal relationship with God.** But salvation in the Bible is always a **call into a community.** People who have experienced the salvation of God's grace are not so much interested in what they have been saved **from**, in presenting "their barcode", but are more interested in what they have been saved, redeemed, restored, **for**. What is it that God is calling me to be and to do **with others**? You can never do this on your own.

But perhaps when we talk about sharing gifts you feel, "**I am not needed.** There are too many people who are more gifted than me, more spiritual than me." In fact, maybe you feel that there are just too many more people! It's a fact that in larger churches it actually harder to recruit people to take part because the size of the church makes you feel that you are not as necessary. It's quite clear from the scripture that **everyone's gifts are needed.** To build up the body..."**each of us** was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift...we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, **as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.**" Not everyone has the same gifts and there is no hierarchy of gifts. I have some gifts, but I haven't got others. And you have some gifts but you haven't got others. Here is a picture of a walking ear. It's a picture of a church where **only some of the gifts are being shared.** But in order to be a complete body **we need every gift shared.** My gifts, your gifts. The idea of a Christian who doesn't participate in their church community, who is not needed, is as foreign in the Bible as the idea of a solo Christian. If you sit on your gift, we all suffer. And this is not about Sundays. **Sunday services are just one expression of what it means to be church** - they are focused on worshipping together and on learning. But being church and using gifts is about so much more - it's about being in community, supporting each other in relationships, praying together, acting together in the community, growing in leadership. I'm not talking about being in a Sunday rota. I'm talking about using your gifts in this community whenever and wherever, to see God's kingdom come. You are needed.

Perhaps you feel, "**I am too damaged.**" You are lacking in confidence, or perhaps people said things to you when you were younger that made you think you get in the way. Perhaps you feel that your gifts are of little consequence. Well, it's quite clear in the scripture that **every gift is important.** Our responsibility as a church is to help you grow, to nurture you, to support you, however "small" your gift might be. Paul even says the parts of the body that **seem the least important are treated with the greatest honour.** Even if you feel on the sidelines, in the body of Christ you are accepted, and necessary. It's not what people said to you, it's not what your family thinks of you, it's not what your teacher said about you that matters - **it's what your Father in heaven thinks of you.** And nobody is too damaged for Him to use. Some might say, "**But it's arrogant to put my gifts forward.** I don't want to draw attention to myself." Well, if using your gift is about you, then you are right. Humility is important. And character is important. That's why Paul says that even if you speak in tongues, or have prophetic powers, or have great faith, **but yet lack love,** it is worth nothing. But as we offer our gifts, the less we can look at ourselves and our motives, and the more we can look to the Lord, then our hearts will be in the right place. Perhaps you are worried about trying to earn God's favour by sharing your gifts. That is certainly something to be wary of. (You don't need to – you already have it!) But the antidote to that way of thinking is not to hold back from sharing, but to seek to get your heart in the right place through worship.

You might say, "But where do I start to discover and develop my gifts?" That's why we have a plan for doing this which is robust and forward-thinking. If we are serious about equipping everyone, and developing gifts, it will involve developing resources, training, gift identification, mentoring, networking with other churches, and support in workplaces. We need to invest as a church in enabling this to happen, and the post of Releasing Gifts Director is being set up over the next year to make this possible. I'd encourage you to read through the plans again, and see them in the light of the big picture I have been talking about.

Last week I heard a talk from a man called "Three Things I learnt while my plane crashed." It was by someone who had survived a crash in the Hudson River. As the plane went down, he said he had three thoughts. "1. I wish I hadn't postponed things. I wish I had seized the moment." 2. "I wish I had been positive with everyone – and not wasted time holding grudges." 3. "The only thing that really counted was to love those whom God had given me."

You are part of Jesus' body on earth. You are not made to be a solo pilot. You are needed. You have gifts which are necessary for the building of God's kingdom. Can I invite you to seize the moment, to offer yourself with all the energy you can muster, and to love those God gives you in this community, by joining in our journey to see the whole body built up in love, as each plays its part.

Study

The three main passages that talk about gifts in the New Testament are: Ephesians 4: 1-16; 1 Cor 12: 4-11, 28-31; Romans 12: 6-8.

Make a list of all the gifts seek to understand of the purpose of each one.

How are these gifts already/expressed in the church? Local community?

Where do they need further development in the church? Local community?

Any feedback from this part of the plans? (Encouraging or questioning.)