A Life of Service to the Glory of God
2 Corinthians 4:1-6; 1 Peter 4:10-11

Last Sunday and again today, we're taking a break from John's gospel. And instead we're considering something that in today's highly individualistic, atomised culture, is going to be deeply counter-cultural. And that is that as God's people we're called to a life of *service*, in community, to the glory of God.

And last week we looked at the community part - how we're called to be a community that's confident in the trials of suffering and opposition; that proclaims Christ, not self; that glories in God, not man; and that sees all of life - including what you do with it - not from a this-moment, present-day, perspective, but from the vantage point of eternity.

But today, I want us to consider the service part: 'Living a life of service' and why you should do that.

And I want us to get under the superficialities of that. Because in our secular culture, it's not like service is not talked about or even valued today. You can read books written by secular authors on servant leadership. People talk about political life as a life of public service. When disasters strike and people rally round those who *serve* are praised.

And yet, as someone once said to me, 'you know how much of a servant heart you have when someone treats you like one.' Have you ever experienced that? You think you're doing pretty well at this service thing, *until* someone treats you like a servant. And then the pride and resentment and anger that well up suggest, maybe I'm not such a servant after all. Have you ever experienced that, or is it just me?

But of course, that begs the question 'why am I serving?' Or, even, 'who am I serving?' Is it just me?

So today, I want to give you three reasons to pursue a life of service, in community, *for God's glory*. Firstly, the Lordship of Christ; Secondly, the Example of Christ; Thirdly, The Gospel of Christ.

The Lordship of Christ
Look at 2 Corinthians 4:5, 'For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.'

And as we saw last week, the context of that is that in places like Corinth you'd get these travelling orators and preachers, who through their eloquence or debating prowess, made a living by making much of themselves, by drawing attention to themselves and creating a following. They were the Instagram or TikTok (if that still exists) influencers of the day. And the stages they stood were the social media platforms of the day.

And Paul's saying, that's not us. We're not promoting ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants, for Jesus' sake. Notice the three parts of that: Jesus Christ as Lord, ourselves as your servants, for Jesus' sake.

Take the first one - because it's not just that they proclaim 'Jesus Christ' - because you could do that. We could proclaim Jesus and his compassion for the outcast, or his willingness to speak truth to power. Or proclaim Christ the healer or Christ the counter-cultural rebel.

But Paul proclaims Jesus Christ *as Lord*. Why? Well, firstly, because that is who he is, by his very nature. But secondly, because of who we are. Because how you see yourself, and how you spend your life, radically depends on who you think the Lord is.

Take traditional cultures. Who or what's the Lord? If you grow up in a more traditional culture, what determines how you see yourself or how you spend your life? It could be your parents, couldn't it. Or the state, the *patri*, the nation. And seeing any of those as Lord will cause you to live a life of duty, even of service. The problem is, it may also swallow your individual identity.

While our modern culture says, 'no! You're the Lord. And it's not for anyone else to tell you how to live. In fact the culture, the nation, others, need to serve *you*.' The problem with that is that everyone else *also* thinks they're lord. And so you can be looking for others to run to your agenda, but all the time they're looking for you to run to theirs and serve them. And that's just a recipe for frustration and anger and division - and we see it in our societies. And to live like that will increasingly alienate you from those around you, making it ever less likely they'll serve you, which just increases your misery.

Instead, Paul says, we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your *servants.*

You see, in the last chapter of the Bible, the apostle John falls down in worship at the feet of an angel, and the angel rebukes him, saying, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you" (Rev 22:9). In other words, 'John, you can't worship me - I'm not the Lord, I'm a servant like you.' Because, if you're living in a kingdom, where someone's the king, and that someone's not you, by definition you're his servant.

And so what flows from knowing that *Jesus Christ* is Lord, and not you, or anyone else, is rightly directed worship, obedience, *and service*.

Ok, but what does it mean to serve him as Lord? Well, we could say a whole load of things. But notice what Paul does *not* say. He does not say, 'we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as *his* servants.' But 'Ourselves as *your* servants.' Because we serve *him* by serving one another.

Listen again to what Peter says, 'As each has received a gift, use it *to serve one another*, as good stewards *of God's* varied grace.' (1 Peter 4:10). Now, in Jesus' parable of the talents, he's the Lord, the master, who entrusts his wealth to his servants to invest. So your gifts, your talents, are not yours, they're his. Entrusted to us as his servants, his stewards, and to be used, Peter says, to serve one another.

So, understanding that Jesus is Lord changes the way you see him, and yourself, and *how* you spend your life. But it also changes the 'why' of how you spend your life.

Because we can serve him, or one another, for our own gain, can't we. I mean, have you ever done something for others, hoping - just tiny bit - that it's noticed? That you get just a little bit of glory or recognition? Or, you could use your gifts, that he's entrusted to you, but use them to further your own agenda.

Instead Paul says, we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants, '*for Jesus' sake'* (2 Cor 4:5). So knowing that *he's* Lord drives *who* you're doing it for and *where* the glory

goes. Think *you're* the Lord, and you might still serve, but your motive will be that you get the glory. You're serving for your sake

Or, you could serve others for *their* sake. But what's the problem with that? It's that it can get toxic. And the relationship becomes unbalanced - because you've put them, or this cause, in the place of Lord. And either you become dependent on them, as you get your identity from serving them or from serving this cause, which is a weight no one can bear, or they become dependent on you, which is also unhealthy.

To truly serve others, you need a Lord who is neither you, nor them, so that he gets the glory.

So look again at what Peter writes, 'Serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies - *in order* that in *everything God may be glorified* through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.' (1 Peter 4:10-11).

So, whether your gifts are more speaking and teaching, or more practical, Peter is saying, speak as one speaking God's word, serve as one serving in God's strength, so that it's Christ who's glorified not us.

So - knowing Christ is Lord - will change how you see yourself - you're a servant. And it'll change who and why you serve, others for Jesus' glory.

But - and maybe some of you need to hear this this morning - it'll also give you the perseverance to keep going in your service. You see, I know from talking to some of you after last Sunday that having to listen to talks on serving can be like taking a cold shower, or being beaten over the head with a stick, because you're already serving - at home, and church, and outside of church.

And if that's you, at the end of 1 Corinthians 15, that wonderful chapter on the resurrection of Christ, Paul says, 'Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, *always abounding in the work of the Lord*, knowing that in the Lord your labour *is not in vain*.' (1 Cor 15:58). You see the resurrection of Christ was the the ultimate vindication that He is the Lord. That he's conquered, sin and death and the futility of life. So don't give up, Paul says. Keep raising your kids, keep loving and serving your neighbours in and out of church. None of it's in vain. Because Christ is risen and he is Lord.

But there's a second reason to pursue a life of service:

The Example of Christ

Now, the truth is that when Paul says, v5 again, 'For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants.' he could have said something other than 'servants' couldn't he? Like Christ is Lord, and we're his generals, or his governors, or his princes. And the tragedy is that in some churches that's what gets proclaimed.

But Paul says 'servants'. Where does he get that from?

Well, James and John, two of Jesus disciples came to him and asked him, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you" (Mark 10:35) - which kind of suggests the implications of Jesus being

Lord and not them haven't quite sunk in yet. But Jesus asks them - what is it that you want? And they reply, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory" (Mark 10:37). In other words, Jesus, when you get into power, we want you to give us the two most important positions in your government. But were they outliers in wanting that? Does their ambition, their desire for power or prestige, set them apart as especially egotistical in comparison to the other disciples? Or even to us?

Verse 41: 'When the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.'

Now, why does someone get indignant? It's when they think they're being treated unfairly, unjustly, or unworthily. In others words, the other ten also had their eye on those two most important seats. They also wanted this kingdom to be about them. And here are James and John saying, we want them to serve us, while 'them' the rest of the 12 were thinking, no, I want them and the rest to serve *me*.

But look how Jesus responds: v43-44, 'Whoever would be great among you must be slave [same word as servant] of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

'Even the Son of Man'. It's Jesus' favourite title for himself. And he gets it from the Old Testament and the vision Daniel saw in Daniel 7: 'And behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one *like a son of man*, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, *that all peoples,* nations, and languages *should serve him*; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.' (Daniel 7:13–14)

So Jesus is saying, the Son of Man, the One who *every one* should serve, came not to be served but to serve.

And at the Last Supper he embodied that. Picture the scene. John tells us that Jesus knew that the Father had given everything into his hands, that he had come from God and was returning to God. He knew that endless glory, and everlasting dominion, and the service of all people, and the throne above every throne was his. So does he sit at his banquet table as Lord, having others wait on him? No.

What does he do? John tells us, 'He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples feet' (John 13:4-5).

Whose job was it to wash the dirt encrusted feet of guests? Was it the master of the house's job? Was it his wife's? Was it one of his children's? Was it for a Jewish servant to do? No. This task was considered so undignified, so beneath anyone one, that the only person you could ask to do it was a pagan slave. And the Lord of all, says 'I will do it' and takes the lowest position of all, and serves the men who will desert him and betray him.

But then he says, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do just as I have done to you." (John 13:14-15).

Last Saturday we watched the final part of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. And in the battle of the Pelennor Fields, Éowyn stands between the dark Lord of the Nazgûls and her injured and dying uncle King Théoden. And with her, in the midst of battle, is Merry, one of the Hobbits, and he's terrified. But in the book, as Merry watches Éowyn, standing alone against this monster, and seeing her selfless bravery, Tolkien says, 'Pity filled his heart and great wonder, and suddenly the slow-kindled courage of his race awoke. He clenched his hand. She should not die, so fair, so desperate! At least she should not die alone, unaided.' And creeping round to the back of the dark Lord, Merry strikes the blow that brings him down, and Éowyn finishes him off.

Example is a powerful thing, isn't it? As Merry's slow-kindled courage is awoken by the courage of Éowyn.

You see, we always immitate those we admire and love and want to be like. And as you see Christ the Lord humbling himself as a slave, a desire to serve is kindled in his people's hearts. As Augustine wrote in his *Confessions*, 'Why are you proud, O man? God became low for you. You would, perhaps, be ashamed to imitate a lowly man, then at least imitate the lowly God.'

Now, I don't know if your family has a family crest, but we don't. But we've thought of designing one. And if we did, we're all agreed what animal we'd put on it. A snail. Because some crests have eagles, don't they? Regal, soaring, and all-seeing. And some have unicorns - mythical and magical, noble and wise. And some have lions - powerful and kingly. But the Slacks are slow and not very exciting, so we'd have a snail.

And if we had a motto it would be 'Just Keep Plodding' except that doesn't translate well into Latin. But we'd also have the word 'service.' Because as one of our girls once grudgingly said, 'we're Slacks, we serve.' But where had they got that from? Well, obviously, from watching us. But we got it from watching our friends Chris and Jan. Because when we were young parents we wanted the joy of service they had in their family.

And the hard truth is that our kids do copy us. We all copy the culture we're immersed in. So if you're a parent, create a culture in your home of serving, not consuming. You see, as you read the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, you see whole families serving together to build up the wall and the city. So imitate Christ and let your kids, and your friends' kids, imitate you.

And for all of us, read the New Testament and you see how each one of us is a part of the body with a job to do. And so if you haven't already found your place to serve, speak to one of our ministry leaders, speak to Linley for music and sound; speak to Geert and Marielle for hospitality stuff, or Hazel for practical stuff. Speak to Su for children's work, or Wilson and Anne-Lize for youth. Paul says to the Ephesians, 'We are his workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus for good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them' (Eph 2:10). We're made to imitate and to imitate Christ. So whether it's in your family, or workplace, or areas you volunteer in - we've been created for service.

And if you're already doing that - thank you! Thank you for imitating Christ, thank you for serving us.

But as we finish, just go back to Jesus saying "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). And then think, *why's he washing the disciple's feet?*

Last point - the third reason we should live lives of service in community:

The Gospel of Christ
And in answering James and John, Jesus compared the way people pursue influence in the world - by domineering over others - to how true greatness is measured in God's kingdom - which is not through consuming but through service.

But there's a danger when we read something like that, and that's to think that we need to earn God's favour through our service. That if we just serve other people enough, our tally of angel points will get us across the line and get us into God's kingdom, or at least into his good books.

But that's not the good news of the gospel. That's a to-do list.

Instead, listen to what Paul writes to the Philippians: 'Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, *by taking the form of a servant*, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, *even death on a cross*.' (Phil 2:3-8).

And in Jesus' day, if you were a freeborn Roman you could not be crucified. It was too degrading. And so, if washing guests feet was a slave's *job*, crucifixion was a slave's *death*. But Jesus Christ the Lord, the One who everyone will serve, the One to whom every knee will bow, took the place of a slave to set us free. And it was there, as he gave his life for us, that he washed not just our feet, but our whole lives clean. Not from the grime of the street, but the grime of our guilt.

And so the good news of the gospel is not that you have to serve and slave for God to make yourself acceptable to him. It's the Christ came as a servant and slave for us. And he lifts us from the place of slavery and makes us his friends and family members.

So, see Jesus Christ the Lord serving you in his life and his death. See him rising and reigning as Lord, and let it kindle in you a life of worship, obedience, and service of him, and his people, to his glory.