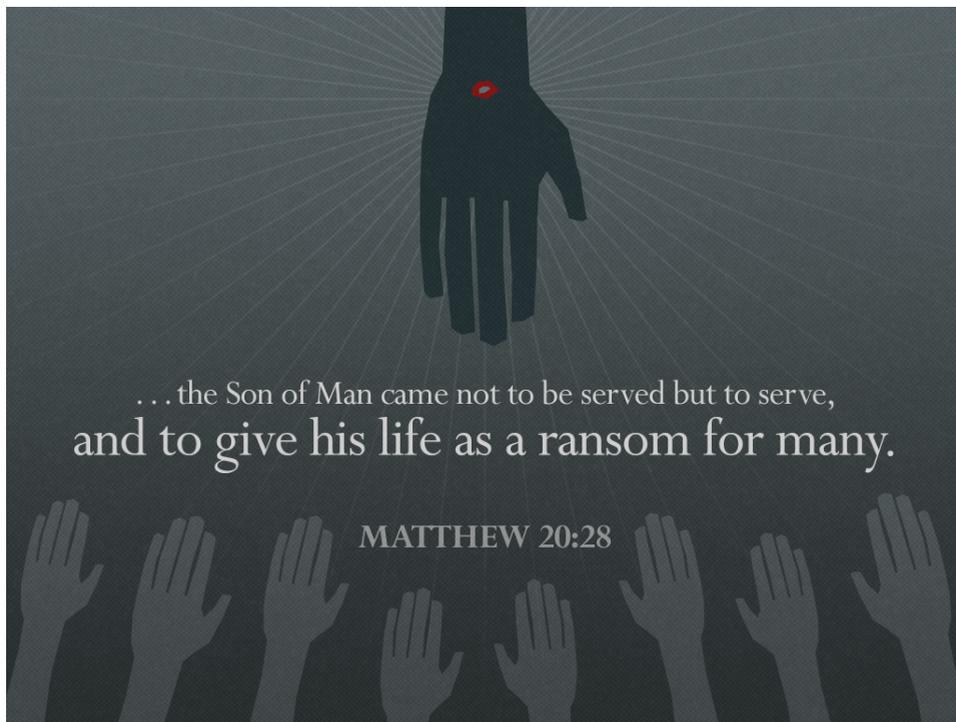


'Serving Community', September 29th 2019.

The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity.

Genesis 3:1-21, Phil 2:1-13, Mark 10:32-45.



We have been thinking about some of the marks of a christian community - of a church - a church community is an intentional community, a generous community, a welcoming community, a listening community and finally a church community is a serving community. We focus on some very well known words by Jesus.

We heard the words, the third time Jesus had predicted his death, as we approach Jerusalem. The disciples have been with

Jesus 3 years at this point. James and John - sons of Zebedee - "came to him and ask we want you to do for us whatever we ask." Such a great way to pray "O Lord, I have to ask of you a humble request, *and I want you to do exactly as I say!*" Jesus responds so graciously doesn't he - he doesn't say 'James and John, let's try that again...' or 'How dare you!' he graciously says ' what do you want?' They want to sit at his right and left hands. There is faith here - they see Jesus victory and triumph - he will win they say and when he does - in his glory - they want to sit at his right and left hands - to be his chief ministers, to be in his cabinet, to be like the prime minister and deputy prime minister or something. James and John along with the other 10 were called to Jesus, in Mark 3, to be with him. To share company, life with him and to be shaped into disciples. You would think they would learned better? Calvin says - its a warning to us - if James and John can get off track, surely we can too!

James and John have no idea what they ask he says. Now the other ten get annoyed. Not because of the offence what James and John have asked. It is because before they have been debating who is the greatest among them. And James and John asking for these positions - top two in the cabinet - which offends them as the others wanted something similar.

Jesus tries to take them back to his vision. Jesus points them to the world they live in and know. The Gentiles - Rome and their rulers - is hierarchical - the those with power exert force over those beneath them. Today you could say it is like the image of an angry CEO calls in his VP and gives him a good telling off. The VP listens, doesn't argue, leaves apologetically. Later he's in the office, he has someone in there, a telling off, more intimidation or abuse, and this continues layer by layer down to the last one.

The last one, goes to his car or bike, goes home, and inflicts this chain reaction upon those near and dear to him. He then says:

"Not so with you, instead whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The primary model for the Christian, was not worldly leadership models where power is expressed, but Jesus. Jesus says he did not come to be served - suggesting that he had every right to be honoured served. But no, the most powerful One (he sustains the universe, all things made through him and by him, as Colossians 1 and John 1 remind us) *he* came to serve. He gave his life - which was the price of our redemption, the price of our reconciliation with God. Our reconciliation was free to us - the price paid for by Christ's death. Ransom - in this context - it is to buy the freedom of a slave or prisoner.

The standard of greatness in the world, Jesus says, is power. The standard of greatness in Jesus is service. To be great is not to have people serve you. To be great in the kingdom to reduce oneself to their service. John Calvin said: "your unique greatness, excellence, and dignity is to submit yourself to your brothers and sisters in Christ." (Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke*, p.276)

We see this in Philippians. Paul is writing to the church of joy - so many times joy or rejoice is mentioned. He says - to these believers - *"be like minded, having the same love being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others,"* (2:3-4). And again, he points to the

example of Jesus - his life and death for us - the one was humble and served. He then says - 'Therefore' (v12) - meaning, after all he has said about looking to the interests of others, and the example of Jesus - "work out your salvation" - working out your salvation includes service of others.

But it is more than serving other believers. When Jesus says - he gave his life as a ransom for many. These were people who did not believe did not trust did not follow. Service in Jesus mind is also serving people who do not follow him. Genesis. After the tragedy of what has happened in the garden, God declares his service of us - a serpent crusher will come - who will strike / bruise the heel of the man, and the man will crush the serpent's head. God's plan begins to rescue, deliver us from this mess. And then the last verse (3:v21), which Linda ended upon which maybe some of you considered - why stop there! Did you consider what God did. After this tragedy. A beautiful creation - much more than this - recall, this is in decay - Romans 8 says - can you imagine what it was like? And God who knows the evil, the pain, the tears, the death that will now come into this world through the fall. To be honest. You'd want to say - leave the garden and shut the door and turn off the lights when you go. What we see. He makes clothes for them to cover their nakedness. Such amazing grace. Now you can build much symbolism into that. How we are without Christ, naked, that through faith in Jesus we are clothed, with robes. The clothes came from animals probably - by blood clothing came, our clothing - the white robes - that come through the blood of the lamb. There is much there. But at this point, simply consider the service done by God - after all that has taken place, he makes clothes. A serving community is about serving our brothers and sisters in Christ and serving those who do not know or worship Christ.

Okay. Going more Practical. We are called to serve. Christ is our example for service but also our confidence. Keller draws this out, (Keller, *Kings Cross*, pp149-151). He mentions a review in 2007, in New York Times Magazine that was entitled "Happiness 101." A psychology article on positive psychology - what makes people happy. Researchers found - if you focus on doing and getting things that give you pleasure, it does not lead to happiness, you end on a treadmill. You become addicted - you need pleasure so you have to do more and more to gain pleasure but you're never satisfied or truly happy. This article said, best way to increase happiness "to do acts of selfless kindness, to pour yourself out for needy people" Now the articles focus was - what do you *do* to be happy - and hence help others. But as you listen, you don't do the acts of kindness for others, you do it for yourself and others benefit.

So what is a better way to serve? Keller says, look at Jesus - if his wounds have paid the ransom - then he proves to our insecure doubting hearts that we are worth everything to him. And we have everything we need in him. We consider the cross and we see how he died, how he served us, how much he loves us. So Keller says, we go out into the world, in joy and humility. We don't need to help people - either to earn points with God, for we know the cross does it all - nor help people to help a need we have inside - because the cross declares we are secure, accepted, valued, significant, loved. We do not need to help other people, instead we want to help them, in order to resemble the one who did so much for us.

There is a second example which Keller (*ibid*, pp148-49) also brings out which is worth reflecting upon and I hadn't seen it until I read it. It is Jeremiah's words in Jeremiah 29. Jeremiah writes to exiles in Babylon, carried away by Nebuchnezzar. They

are far from home. They are told they will be there for 70 years - for some they hear, they will die there. They will not return. What is their attitude supposed to be inside this society. They could have kept themselves to themselves and had nothing to do with it, and keep the faith. Maybe they could have sought to destabilize the regime and work with other powers to bring it down. What does God say: He says settle down, but then goes on to add: " Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper. " God says, ' I want you to make Babylon a great city to live in. I want you to serve your neighbours - even if they speak different language and they don't worship the same God. Pray for it, seek it to prosper, love it, serve it. "If Babylon prospers through your service to it, you prosper too." (Keller, pp148-149). Daniel, as he serves the rulers in Babylon, I think we can say embodies this attitude.

So, how can you serve this city of Amersfoort or the place where you live?

So serving community is about serving one another and it is about serving those outside the Christian community.

Serving those outside. What examples can I give. Prayer Walking. This has been something that we have done from time to time. But as Jeremiah 29, pray for the city. The streets where, we can walk with a dog, or take a 20-30 minute walk and pray for God's blessing and work on those streets and house. And listening to the promptings of the Spirit, as he may want you to pause on a street or near a block of houses and pray for it. And the street where you live. To pray for your neighbours above, opposite, below, for perhaps you may well be the only person who is praying for them - as we live in an increasingly smaller

Christian community. We often have lists of fellow believers to pray for, but can we have a slot on that list - neighbours. Marina and Jolanda and Angela currently and in the past have given time, to serve people in the AZC. There is an organisation called Stichting Present which can help church groups be linked to needs in Amersfoort, to help practically for a day or afternoon. In a previous church there was a lovely lady whose ministry - service - she was retired - she would go into a school and read with the children who found reading hard and help them practice and listen. To be honest the list once you get into it, goes on and on. Our workplace as Peter drew out last month - a place where our economic vocations, give us many - neighbours you could say - whom we are to love and serve: customers, as well as bosses, subordinates, coworkers, suppliers, and competitors.

But can I say. Martin Luther the Reformer, when he discussed loving and serving your neighbour, he included evangelism - what great service can you give to someone, but to introduce them to or make them aware of the Great Servant King who served them through giving his life?

Serving each other. We have mentioned the pastoral care and visiting team - Jolanda and Marianne who are happy to visit you and talk and listen about things that matter. To serve you by giving time to listen, talk and pray. The prayer ministry team. A ministry - a service - valued by many here. We have a training day on Oct 12th - here at the Nieuwe Erven - if you are thinking, if that is an area to serve in this church community, come along, attend, and you and I will have a chat afterwards. We have Miriam and Maria who serve through music, can you assist them or join them in that ministry? What about helping welcome people and help them settle into calling this church their home.

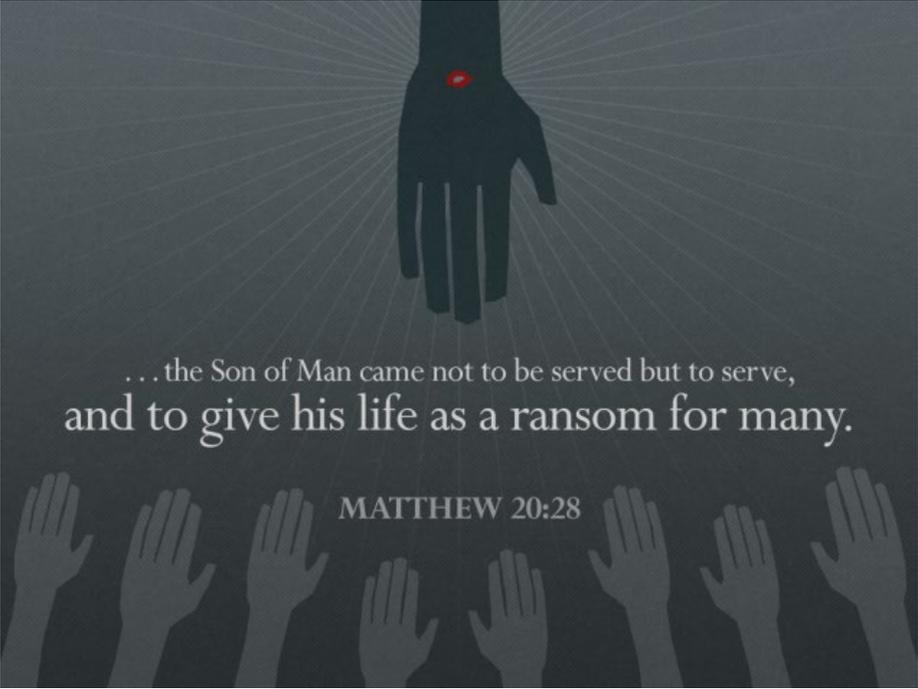
This leads me to the question that the council yesterday asked on its away day - sometimes we can be thinking - what positions or roles we need in All Saints - but also we need to ask, what can people give to All Saints , what's on your heart to serve here in this congregation. Returning to prayer ministry, if you are considering how God is calling you to serve in All Saints or in God's world, why not bring that to the prayer ministry team and ask them to pray with you for insight and wisdom?

Across this month, we have been thinking about some of the marks of a christian community - of a church - a church community is an intentional community, a generous community, a welcoming community, a listening community and finally a church community is a serving community - serving brothers and sisters, serving those who do not believe.

Shall we pray:

Eternal God and Father,

you create us by your power and redeem us by your love: guide and strengthen us by your Spirit, that we may give ourselves in love and service to one another and to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



... the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many.

MATTHEW 20:28