

## Service Transcript

### 7<sup>th</sup> February 2021

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**Speaker: Mark Reid**

Jesus calls us each one to come to him - in Matthew 11:28–30 the Message translation – he says

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

Jesus calls everyone to himself, winners, losers, the strong and the weak, young and old, the happy the sad – all are welcome, Jesus calls all to come to him

We sing Jesus’ invitation in this song – as it says in the chorus there is room for all – he calls us in his love and grace.

As we come into Jesus’ presence, we see our awesome holy God and it make us realise our lives are not how they should be – there is stuff in our lives that separate us from God. We do things that are not right and we don’t do the things we should do

Sing this prayer of confession – and cry Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy

As it says in the song

With a doubting heart I follow The paths of earthly wisdom;

**And**

I have built an altar Where I worship things of man;

How true that can be of us

**Have a Time of silence now as we each confess our sins before Jesus, and ask for his forgiveness and mercy**

*The bible says in 1 John 1*

If we say we have no sin,

we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins,

He, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

**Thank you God for your mercy and grace for me - All glory be to your name God Amen**

Later we will sharing communion – in this we share bread and wine to remember Jesus’ death for each of us and we look forward to his coming again. All who love Jesus and believe in Him as their saviour are welcome to join us in this.

Now I want to share a story from Rachel and Jacob, a couple serving with OM in North Africa  
“We had never heard of this country,” said Rachel. “I didn’t know anything about it.” Yet a short while after moving to North Africa, Rachel and her husband Jacob felt completely at home. Walking around their neighbourhood one day, Rachel remarked to Jacob: “I feel like I’m living my dream. This is what I feel like I was created for: to live amongst a Muslim population. I feel so at home here, it is so crazy. How can I feel so at home in this place I didn’t even know about?” She told the Lord: “If we are to leave, You’re gonna have to rip me out of here, because I love these people.”

What really struck me about what they say is that it applies to us living where we do, you don’t have to live in a country in North Africa. Each of us can pray that God will align our path with those he is drawing to himself so we can share Christ’s love with them, whoever it is we come across day by day, and we share life and God’s love with them.

Thy kingdom come – still praying for the 5?

**We Pray:** Lord God align our paths with those you are drawing to yourself so we can share something of you with them and have that amazing privilege of playing a part in helping someone on their journey to you.

**Continue in Prayer as we pray about the Coronavirus pandemic**

Lord God we are very blessed in this country to have a national health service and for vaccinations against the virus. Thank you God. We pray for all those who have lost loved ones due to the virus, and for all those suffering long term effects – Lord be with them, comfort them we pray. May they know your presence with them, your loving arms around them.

We pray for people in countries where health care is unaffordable for a lot of people, for countries where governments are not making the vaccine readily available – Lord be with those people we pray. We pray for Christian organisations working in those areas – be with them, keep them safe – enable them to be a blessing in your name. Hear our prayer we pray.

**Prayer for some of the local organisations we support serving people in God’s name**

Pop up shops - providing much needed help for those struggling to afford food. **Thank** you God for the volunteers, thank you for the food provided by the supermarkets. May people who go there know of your touch and your love for them.

WPN – Lorna and John – keeping in touch with and helping clients. No labels. **Thank you God** for Lorna and John, for all that they are doing to support and help people in these very challenging times. Be with them Lord, may they know your presence with them as they meet and support clients.

BOOST – Josh. **Lord** thank you for Josh, for all he is doing to support the teachers and pupils at Felixstowe School. Be with him we pray, give him your wisdom, perseverance and inspiration so he can continue to be a blessing and to be your presence in the school.

Hope Trust – **Paul and Sheila**, working from home, supporting the folk they are in contact with

Felixstowe CAP debt centre – **thank** you for we have been able to do, for the clients who are now debt free, for Rick – we pray that who are people anxious about money and debt will reach out and contact CAP

Hear our prayers we pray in Jesus name. Amen

As we come to share communion together – we sing of Jesus our saviour, who didn't want heaven without us – whose love is greater than our sin - we sing of his wonderful name

**Reading: Acts 2:42-47**

## **Committed To Serve**

Another week gone by and another week closer to the end of the pandemic – whenever that may be. Will everything go back to normal in time? Much will, but as far as church is concerned, what will be the impact of the last year on the work and witness of God's people? For our local church, I'm sure our desire would be to grow into a church that's relevant and vibrant in our local community.

We have been asking ourselves what a growing and vibrant church might look like and we need go no further than the early church for our example. Spiritually, we read of how Holy Spirit was poured out, and we see passionate disciples, committed to their new-found Saviour – and of course open to be filled and used by the Holy Spirit.

We have been looking at verses 42 to 47 of Acts chapter 2, where we found they committed themselves to five things

Worship – they were committed to God

Fellowship – they were committed to one another

Discipleship - they were committed to learn

Service - they were committed to to serve

Evangelism - they were committed to share Good News

Although we can identify these five distinctives in these verses, it's fair to say that they are tightly bound up with one another. e.g. they were committed to worship and part of that was a commitment to discipleship – to know Him more, and to proclaim His worth by obeying Him and of course that includes loving those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ and binding ourselves to them as part of God's family – and that involves serving one another. Just as discipleship is the logical result of worship, service is the logical result of discipleship. Service is also the result of worship. In proclaiming the worth of God, our desire is to obey Him and the command of Jesus is to love on another as He has loved us and serving one another is its direct consequence.

The way that our society sees church is like a club society, company or charity – we have just changed our status into a registered charity. But how does God see church. As we look at the NT we find that God sees it as His family, a building, a temple – something built up of interlocking and interdependent parts.

We also see that we are loved people. He has loved us and we reflected on that cost as we shared communion a few moments ago. What did the eternal Son do to express that love. Here are these words again:

*(He) did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;  
rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:7-11)*

The eternal Son of God became a servant. What's the characteristic of a servant? Obedience to the master – Jesus served the purposes of God by becoming obedient to death. That's the picture in COMMUNION. But there's more to Jesus' service than that. Jesus' death served us – He served our needs as He gave Himself for our salvation. That was the purpose of His death - redemption. This is what communion symbolises.

And in case you think the notion of Jesus serving us is a step too far, then we only have to look at John 13 as JESUS WASHES THE DISCIPLES FEET - He voluntarily as the Master knelt and washed the disciples feet, the job of the most lowly servant or slave. The disciples understood the picture. He as the Master served them, now they must in humility serve one another.

This notion of humility and service takes us right back to Paul's words in Philippians 2 which we just considered, which were written as an example of the humility and service we should show one another, as we see in humility, the Son of God abasing Himself to redeem us. He placed our needs above His.

So we serve one another as part of the church of Jesus Christ, as part of the family of God. The nature of that service can be seen in the two most common Greek words for servant in the NT.

The first is *doulos* – a bond servant, a bonded slave. Someone who commits to serve someone else. In Roman society that was a term associated with slavery. Paul always described himself as a *doulos* of Christ. The picture of service to Christ for believers is always as a *doulos* of Christ – by faith, we have bonded ourselves to Jesus. Consequently we are bonded to one another as fellow believers. As God's church, we serve one another in humility – and that's the whole drift of the NT.

On the other hand, there was another type of servant mentioned in connection with the Church – diakonos. This was a trusted servant, one with responsibility in the household. In the Greek and Roman world, household servants often took on great responsibility in prosperous homes. It is from *diakonos* that we get the word deacon. Churches appoint deacons, those to serve the church in practical ways as ones trusted to take charge on their behalf. A central concept of leadership in the church is service.

On the whole serving one another as God's people are more to do with *doulos* than *diakonos*. We are bonded to one another for our mutual benefit and for the glory of God. How did that work out in the practice of the very early church?

*All the believers were together and had everything in common.  
Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need*

We can see here that their commitment to one another was dramatic and costly. They were prepared to share what they had with the weakest and poorest amongst them. It was something that defined the early church. It reflects Christ - as we look at the bread and wine, we see Jesus laying everything down for our benefit. The church was not merely a chummy club, but a place where God's people were prepared to sacrifice what they had for the benefit of one another – it was service that was costly but generous.

As an aside the *diakonos* bit came eventually in Chapter 6 where the task of the distribution of food among the disciples became so great that the Apostles got the church to choose seven Deacons to serve in food distribution. This they did.

#### SERVICE IN THE POST-COVID WORLD

For the church in the post-covid world, the challenge of the early church is the same – we are called to serve one another. We are called to serve sacrificially, ensuring that the weakest amongst us are provided for. That is almost completely contrary to the values of our society which stresses the importance of the individual over community, personal wealth over shared resources, protecting our rights over social justice.

One of the contrasts I first noticed with the pandemic was that it brought out the very best and very worst in our society. It was amazing to see a sense of community and purpose in the first lockdown, with so many in the community, Christians included in serving and caring for those most impacted by the lockdown. In contrast there have been those who broke lockdown and abused the system for whatever personal selfish reasons. It was wonderful to see community values coming to the fore – because that's a reflection of the principles of Christ and the teaching of Scripture. And it's also been sad to see it slowly disappearing over the months in our wider community here in Felixstowe and nationally..

It brings me to this question, if being sacrificial towards the way we serve one another, love one another, minister to one another, physically, practically, spiritually is the way of Christ, is the teaching of the apostles and so forth, how much did we practice these values pre-covid, and what should be our attitudes and practices post-covid?

We have always been a caring church and we already have a culture of care and that has

been valuable during lockdowns, particularly as many of the people in the church had vulnerability to the disease due to age or health. What we also had before Covid, was a notion of service that meant we had to maintain the programmes of the church and the practicalities of a church building. There is nothing wrong with that if it advances the kingdom and builds up the church. But what happens when service no longer does that, or we no longer see the point of it?

I recall that when we did the questionnaire, that a few of you were relieved that you were no longer having to do areas of service you had been committed to a while back but you had been finding a burden. It leads me to a question as we consider return to normality and as we look to restart stuff. How is what we're planning to restart going to build up the fellowship, how is it going to advance the kingdom?

This is something we need to get right. Why? Because as we consider our relationships and our commitment to one another and our commitment to serve, if they are right before God, MRBC will grow and thrive. Otherwise, they won't and we'll look at what happens when churches lose the plot next time. How do I know this? It's in the second chapter of Acts. Let's read on in verse 47.

*Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

The early church had no buildings or programmes. All they had was one another. Their lifestyle was sufficiently different to be noticed and we have this phrase here; that they were *enjoying the favour of all the people*. And what happened? *And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved*. Whereas we know that the Apostles did speak publicly to people about Jesus because we have some of their sermons, what seems to have been driving the addition of people to the church was the relationships the disciples had with one another. When that was right, the Lord added to their number.

What is our reputation? What is our reputation in our local community? I will leave us to reflect on that this week rather than tell you what I think. The church in Jerusalem had a positive reputation – they worshipped with one another, they were committed to following Jesus, but they were committed to one another and served one another in a sacrificial way. And it was noticed, it was approved of and God used it to add people to the church.

What is our reputation? Does it need to change? How is it going to change? Please reflect on that before God before we look more closely again at verse 47 next time. Let's pray.

PRAYER

Father, as we come before You this morning, we recognise that Jesus died and has risen. We see in Him our model of sacrifice and service. We praise You for Him and thank You that we have had this opportunity to share communion and listen to Your voice.

You have placed us together as this expression of church in Maidstone Road to serve your purposes. Help us we pray to serve one another willingly, lovingly, sacrificially and unconditionally in the coming months and years so that others will be able to see the Spirit alive in us and working amongst us, that they may be drawn to Jesus as a result. We know that this commitment to one another is of You because Jesus is our model, our example. Give us strength by Your Spirit to change attitudes to one another where they are not quite right; to grant and accept forgiveness where we need to and to work for the common good in Christ.

We ask this in Jesus' name,

**Amen.**

### **For Reflection & Discussion**

1. When Jesus died on the cross, in what respect was He serving God and what respect was He serving our needs? What can we learn from this about serving one another?
2. How did the early church serve one another in Acts 2:42-47? Do we apply how they served one another literally or are there underlying principles? What should be the purpose of our service to God and to one another?
3. The early church acted in a way that attracted the favour "of all the people." Their reputation was a positive one that resulted in people coming to Christ. What is our reputation? Does it need to change? How is it going to change?