

NEW YEAR SERVICE 2nd January 2022

Welcome, Notices, Birthday Box

2202 THEY ONLY HAD ONE JOB

As we come to the beginning of a new year, let's start the right way by committing ourselves to God being mindful that we are in difficult times and we need to trust Him and commit ourselves afresh to Him as we move forward into a new phase of our life as a church.

OPENING WORDS

A God makes us a people:

B *we are shaped by God's will.*

A Jesus calls us together:

B *we meet in Jesus' name.*

A The Spirit binds us together:

B *and leads us into truth.*

A We come as a fellowship of believers in God, living under the rule of Jesus Christ:

B *seeking his mind through the guidance of the Spirit and the Scriptures.*

A We come as a people on a journey with God, open to change:

B *ready to discover new ways of being church at this time.*

A We come with our various gifts of ministry, given by the Spirit:

B *called to share in God's mission of reconciliation in the world.*

A *We come as people who are free, because Christ is our Lord:*

B *finding unity in diversity and defending liberty for all.*

A We come to make the body of Christ visible in the local congregation:

B *and to express the fullness of his body in relationships between the churches.*

646 *All I once held dear*

PRAYER

Arise, shine (video song)

REDEDICATION OF LEADERSHIP TEAM AND OF CHURCH MEMBERS

On this first communion Sunday of the year, we take the opportunity to re-commission the Leadership Team which was re-elected *en masse* in November because of the change in our charitable status as a church. We also recognise that we are *all* called and gifted by the Spirit to serve God and to minister to others in the church, whether that be in leadership or in some other way. We recognised that when we declared earlier: *we come with our various gifts of ministry, given by the Spirit: called to share in God's mission of*

reconciliation in the world. We are going to recognise that this morning not by commissioning our leaders alone, but by commissioning one another to God's work here at Maidstone Road in the coming year. I'm first going to ask our leadership team to come to the front, all the congregation to stand and all the Zoomers to turn on their sound.

SLIDE

As servants of Christ, our calling as a church family is to trust our leaders, pray for them, encourage and help them in the work God has called them to do. Will you, as the church family promise to support your leaders in this way?

Church Members:

We will and we ask God to help us.

SLIDE

Pastor: *(to Leaders)*

Do you believe that God has called you through His church to serve as Leaders and do you promise, relying on the Lord's grace and the Spirit's power, to exercise your ministry faithfully?

Leadership team:

We will and we ask God to help us.

DON'T MOVE SLIDE ON

Pastor

Let's Pray: Loving God, we wonder at the way you call women and men into partnership with you for the sake of your saving purposes for the world. You call us in Christ and empower us by your Spirit, so that your church may be built up and your gospel proclaimed and lived.

We thank you for these brother and sisters whom you have called to serve you within this fellowship. We give you thanks for all you give us through them, for their following of Jesus and their willingness, by your grace, to serve together.

As we commission them for this ministry, we ask your blessing on them. Guide and equip them by your Spirit that your church may grow in wisdom, love and unity, and that your name may be glorified, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SLIDE

Leader *(to congregation)*

Do you as members and regular attenders of Maidstone Road Baptist Church commit yourselves afresh to God's service. Will you support one another in prayer, and in friendship and fellowship? Will you seek to build one another up in the Scriptures, in worship and in our walk with God? Will you care for one another as members of God's family, serve one another in love, and live and speak Good News to this community.

Church Members

We will and we ask God to help us.

(ask them to be seated)

SLIDE

Leader Almighty God we thank you that you have given us one another to fulfill your mission in this community. As we have commissioned one another to your service, we ask you to

bless us, that we will grow closer to you and to one another as we worship, serve, witness and walk together with you. May you strengthen us as we desire to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

SLIDE

All *By the power of your Holy Spirit
Make bold our vision of your kingdom.
Strengthen us to do your will
and help us to walk together in your way.
Pour down your Spirit,
that the commitments we have made to one another may be our
our duty and delight,
and that by our life together we may glorify you,
Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

(ask all to turn sound off)

READING

Matthew 18:1-5

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

REFLECTION: The Pursuit of Greatness

INTRO

It happens in almost every area in life: there's always someone you know that thinks that they are better than someone else for whatever reason. QUOTE It's no surprise to find that in the Gospels there are several incidents where the disciples would argue that some of them were greater in the Kingdom of Heaven than others such as in the first verse we just read. I've never found a shortage of them in our generation either! We know from the Gospel accounts that some of the disciples had a higher profile than others, particularly Peter, James and John. But were they *greater* than the others just because of the role they played within the group?

And what quality is it that makes one person greater than another anyway? I thought that I would go back to basics and ask the question WHAT IS GREATNESS? In the Greek, the word Matthew uses has roughly the same use as the English word for greatness.

DEFINITION

Greatness is a concept of a state of superiority affecting a person or object in a particular place or area.

(I'm going to deal with great people rather than great ideas or things today)

For the disciples, who was best? Who was most important? Who was going to have superiority in Jesus' coming kingdom?

Think about it, what on earth made these men think that they were great? They were fishermen, tax-collectors, ordinary folk, so they had hardly earned greatness through that. What made them think that they had any status in heaven other than riding on Jesus' coat tails? In the Gospels they didn't really do much to shower themselves with glory. Frankly, whatever greatness they may have later achieved, they didn't show much of it in the Gospels – they really were disciples – a

motley bunch of students, sometimes showing genius and other times beset by failure culminating in the description at Gethsemane, *"they all forsook Him and fled."* Great? I think not.

That said, who we think is great is very subjective and it can change over time. So look at these characters.

US PRESIDENTS

So who is the greater of these two? Obama or Trump? Or neither! We may not have a problem with this one, but Americans are firmly divided as to the relative greatness of these men. Then take this character.

STATURE OF CECIL RHODES. This is the statue of Cecil Rhodes at Oriel College in Oxford. In his day, Rhodes was hailed as a great man in southern Africa. He was a man who achieved greatness through his mining interests in South Africa and in politics. His was a life of wealth and politics. Today, he is derided for his commitment to British imperialism, his views on race and segregation and exploitation of black labour. Statues of him are fast disappearing, including the one at Oriel. "Great" wouldn't now be a term to describe Cecil Rhodes through the lens of history. In a world of changing values, how many heroes whose greatness we have lauded in the past are now pariahs? How many lesser people are now regarded as truly great?

ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU. On the other hand this guy will be remembered as one of the greats of the modern age for his stand against apartheid in South Africa, for the way in which he held to peaceful opposition to apartheid and his role in the efforts towards peace and reconciliation post apartheid. His were words of peace, humility and reconciliation. He is one of the greats of the modern age for his Christian faith and for his stand as a Christian for peace and justice in South Africa. His was a different type of greatness to Rhodes' which will hopefully live on in memories for a lot longer.

Greatness is in the eyes of the beholder. Who is great in our eyes is not necessarily great in the eyes of another. It's subjective. I've put something in the discussion questions to help you think of who we think is great and why.

WHO IS GREATEST IN THE EYES OF GOD?

You won't be surprised to learn that God has different standards of greatness to our human values and however subjective we may think human definitions of greatness are: what God thinks of as greatness is definitive in the universe. For us a God's people, it should be the only definition that matters and we find it in the four verses we read earlier. I shall unpack them next week but for now I'll leave you with these thoughts as we come to communion.

Firstly GOD IS GREAT. Look through the Psalms and you'll find so many proclaiming the greatness of God. He's great because He's the Creator – all things were made by Him and through Him. When it comes to God being great, there is none greater than the one who has the power and the glory in the universe. It's what most people think greatness is – power and its exercise. And God has unlimited power.

But God sees greatness in a quite different way. We know that God is personal. The symbols on this table reveal for us another aspect of the nature of God that makes him great to us. He is the One who loved us, poor, insignificant sinners. He showed His grace, sending His Son to die for us despite the fact that we could never deserve it.

JESUS REFLECTS GOD'S GREATNESS. This table stands as a testimony to the greatness of God who didn't spare His only Son but gave Him up for us all (Rom 8:32). In His life and death, Jesus revealed what God regards as true greatness; being prepared to lay down one's all for the benefit of others. Whilst we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Whatever Matthew 18 reveals to us, it starts here, with God setting the standard of greatness for us, by revealing His loved for us and being prepared to become nothing to redeem us. What love! What sacrifice!

WE ARE CALLED TO GREATNESS

I'd say that most of us are ordinary folk. We don't aspire after greatness in the human sense. Most of us are retired or retiring. There are few who have that driving ambition for power and influence, but we all know someone like that and we see it in our politicians. In that respect they all trying to obtain and exercise power, but none can compare to the power and glory of God.

As His people, God calls all of us without exception to be great and strive after greatness. By that I don't mean the greatness of power, of influence, of lauding ourselves over others but by imitating the greatness of Christ in our daily lives and as His church. Matthew 18 is a passage about pursuing greatness – the greatness of Christ.

Where does the story of the greatness of Christ start? Not in a palace, not in a grand country, not to a privileged great family, not to aspirational parents. As we have been so recently reminded, He started life as a helpless baby, became a child, lived a life. And Jesus draws a child to Himself and says "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." That's where greatness starts and ends – the greatness of Christ and this table represents that.

NOW IS THE TIME TO STEP UP TO THE MARK

Where does the road back start from the pain of this pandemic? It starts with the humility of Christ. It starts with the small child. It starts with love. It starts with sacrifice for the weakest, with one another. Never forget that, because Christians go wrong and Church goes wrong when we go beyond that, and stop loving one another and start believing that we are greater than others.

As we begin a new year; a year in which have to handle change forced on us by the pandemic, a year when we knew we were going to start to consider our future as a fellowship with a change of Ministry; let's recognise the failings of our humanity our failings as a Church and affirm again God's call. It's a good start point. Let's pray.

CONFESSION

(Please turn your sound back on for the following prayers)

Leader Almighty God, we confess to you that we are sinful humanity and failing disciples, just like your disciples of old. Despite who you have made us in Christ, we fail in so many ways and we confess our own failures in the silence now.

Silent prayer ...

SLIDE

As a church, we confess that despite your call, we have not made every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;

All we have sometimes replaced your mission with our own;

***we have often been half-hearted in our fellowship-sharing,
and our life together has not always witnessed to your love.
Forgive us, we pray.***

Leader By the missionary-grace of your Father's heart,
All *make us your missionary people.*

Leader By the life-changing forgiveness of Jesus,
All *set us free to love one another and your world.*

Leader By the heart-cleansing power of your Spirit
**All *empower us to walk together as your people in the path of obedience.
Forgiving God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, forgive and renew us, we pray,
through Jesus Christ our Saviour, Amen.***

475 Purify my heart

COMMUNION

Hebrews 10:19-23

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Prayer of thanks for the Broken body and shed blood of Jesus

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,

“This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying,

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The bread and wine

257 *It's Your blood (during wine distribution)*

FELLOWSHIP PRAYERS

980 *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

Father God, whatever 2021 holds for us, for good or for ill, individually and as your church, Lord may we know your presence in our lives and in the church, your hand leading and guiding us throughout 2021. May we live our lives in the knowledge of your grace and mercy towards us - knowing that nothing can separate us from your love that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. For your glory and renown we pray.

Discussion & Reflection

1. Try to think of people you consider great. Who are they and why are they great? Look at Matt 18:1-2. How does Jesus concept of greatness differ from yours?

2. Think now of someone who you used to think was amazing but you have a changed opinion of now? What happened? Did you struggle in your own mind to change that opinion? Why?

Look at Philippians 2:5-11

3. Jesus said: *whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* How did Jesus do this in His life? How difficult for Him was that do you think? What was the result? What do we learn from it for ourselves?