

TJW, HT, 29.3.09, 9.15am & 11am,

Philippians 2.1-11

our values no.4: everyone serving Christ

Can anyone tell me what this is? [show picture].....

Yes, it's a drive-in church. And the reason people love the drive-in, or the drive-through, is that it allows you to pick up what you want, to get the experience you want, without actually having to rub shoulders with any other real people - except as they hand you your Big Mac through the car window.

Of course, "drive-in" church rips the heart out of "church".

God has created church as a family of people who love and serve each other.

Church is not a 'drive-through' meeting where you can come in, park yourself privately in your place in the building, maybe wave over at the people in the car next to you, take-in the spiritual nourishment you want, and then head privately home.

Church is not meeting, it's family. And in the family of people who belong to Christ, it should be a family of love for each other, and service of one another.

Seeing things this way sets us up well for this morning's sermon, which is the next in the series of what we're calling "our values".

Last week we took a break for Mothering Sunday - but over these weeks we're preaching on the five values that we've established for

ourselves. They set down what matters to us - what we stand for - what we're here for.

Before long we should all have these on the tips of our tongues - and next week we'll have some bookmarks and some little credit-card-size cards with them on, for you to take away and keep, as your reminder.

Value 1 was: everyone transformed by Christ.

Value 2: everyone growing in Christ.

Value 3: everyone praying through Christ.

And this morning, number 4: everyone serving Christ.

We're drawing this value particularly from that Bible-reading from Philippians, so I do recommend that you have it open in front of you, so you can follow along - Philippians chapter 2.

It's quite deliberate that all of these values are about Jesus Christ.

They all flow straight out of him, and his gospel.

And that's especially vital to remember with Christian service.

Lives of Christian service should not be about just doing my duty.

If they are, we might work hard for each other, but we'll be miserable about it, and probably begrudging - although we might keep that hidden behind a stiff upper lip - as if we were God's employee - a shop-floor worker in his factory, and not a member of his family.

If you turn back a page, to chapter 1 verse 27, you'll see what this whole section is about [READ 1.27a].

Our lives should match up with the gospel of Christ, and flow from it. So Christian service is healthy when it's all based on Christ - which is why, over the page in chapter 2 - God gives us this rich, powerful poetic description of Jesus.

And what this paints for us is a portrait of **(1.) Jesus Christ, as our servant, and our Lord.**

See his attitude as a servant, from verse 5 [READ verses 5-7].

From the beginning of time, Jesus has the very nature of God.

Any children that are born to you share in your human nature - they're human, just like you - (although some teenagers wonder if their parents really are human... - and some parents wonder the same about their teenagers.)

So the Son of God is also God the Son, because he is, in very nature, God.

Yet his attitude is: "Being God isn't a status I'm going to use for my own advantage. Even though I'm God, I will act like a servant. I'll take on the weak, lowly form of a human being. I'll be born into the world, with all its pain and sorrow. And I'll be born not in a palace, but in a dingy cow-shed, in an insignificant town, to parents with no status in the world."

He didn't stop being God - but he added to himself the role of a servant.

Have you ever known someone getting promoted at work who got more humble - who became more willing to look after the cleaning-lady and to serve her - they higher up the ladder they climbed?

That's pretty rare. No one's going to win the new series of "The Apprentice" by refusing to use everything and everyone to their own advantage.

But the most exalted being in the universe, God himself, as Jesus Christ, took the attitude of a servant.

And his attitude led him to the most radical, astounding action - verse 8 [READ].

God has power over life and death. Yet Christ willingly submitted himself to the agony of a lingering death - and to the humiliation of public execution.

Maybe you can think of someone who seems to have it in for you all the time. We know how much we hate it when someone like that gets the better of us - when we lose face in front of them.

And can you imagine God submitting himself to death?! It would sound like nonsense, wouldn't it, if it weren't true - like a player deliberately scoring an own goal, just when his team was about to win.

But God did it, because that was the sacrifice that was needed to deal with the punishment of death due to us for our rebellion against him. So, for Christ: a servant-attitude led to servant-action.

And also: what looked like defeat was actually the gate-way to victory.

See verse 9. In the one word at the beginning of that verse - “therefore” - you get the whole logic of Christian life and service [READ verses 9-11].

Jesus is Lord right now - he’s king in his world, right now - because he humbled himself as a servant.

We hate that logic don’t we. We find it so hard to believe.

Our logic is: Don’t humble yourself too much - don’t look too weak - put yourself out a bit for others, but don’t over-do it - because otherwise you might not get anywhere in life - people might walk all over you - they might take advantage of you.

But for Jesus a servant-attitude led into servant-action, and therefore he was exalted as Lord.

Now in this, in Jesus Christ, are the roots of **(2.) a life spent serving Christ.**

And they’re spelt out for us in verses 1-5.

There are two particular roots. The first is this: the experience of a saving relationship with Christ.

Do you see that in verse 1? [READ verses 1-2].

Healthy Christian service starts not with a rule-book, but with a relationship with a saviour - and its a relationship with an impact.

That relationship, and its impact, are described in four ways in verse 1. Just follow them through with me.

If we’ve put our trust in Jesus Christ, then God has united us spiritually with him. And if you know that’s happened, that will encourage us - encourage us that we must spend our lives serving him, because anything else is a waste of life. And it will encourage us that we can serve him, because in him is the strength for you to do it.

And, verse 1 continues...“If you have any comfort from his love.” If you know Christ loved you enough to die in your place, to wipe your sins away for ever, then that will comfort you.

I have a favourite hymn that puts this beautifully, and I need these words often:

“When Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look to see him there, who made an end of all my sin.”

And next: “If you have any common sharing in the Spirit.” If you belong to Christ, he’s sent his Holy Spirit in you.

Most families share a common surname - it’s the mark that they belong together.

(And it was reported this week that some of the more embarrassing surnames are dying out over the years, because people are changing them. If the trend continues, there soon won’t be any ‘Daft’ families left in the country. If you see what I mean.)

The Holy Spirit in you is God's family-name on you - the mark that you no longer belong just to yourself - but now belong to him and to all his people who share in that same Spirit.

And finally in verse 1 - "if you have any tenderness and compassion".

That could be about our feeling for each other - but more likely it's about knowing God's tenderness and compassion towards us, shown to us in Jesus Christ.

Do you see what God says to us here? If you've experienced any of this - and if you're a Christian, you have - well then you just must be and will be joyfully united in serving and loving Christ and each other.

So one root of a life spent serving Christ is not a dutiful keeping of rules - but the experience of Christ saving you, loving you, pouring his Spirit into you. That must drive you, like the tide drives a boat along - into service of him.

And there's another root of Christian service here, in Philippians. It's this: a Christ-like attitude.

The lynch-pin verse this morning is verse 5 [READ].

The only way our relationships with one another will be full of love and service is if we start with each Christian resolving each morning

for themselves, before they step out the front-door, to have the same attitude - that is, the servant-attitude of Christ.

For Christ, servant-action grew out of a servant-attitude. It's the same for us.

And this attitude and action have got to be directed two ways.

First, it's got to be a Christ-like attitude to myself. Do you see that in verse 3? [READ verse 3a].

And it's also got to be a Christ-like, servant-attitude towards other Christians, as verse 3 continues [READ verses 3b-4].

I reckon our first reaction to those verses is often this: "I can think of someone who really needs to hear this. I hope they're listening!".

You see, there's just about no one who thinks they're selfish.

Just about everyone thinks they spend lot of time running round looking after other people's interests - clearing up after children, sorting out your family, taking care of elderly parents.

Selfishness and self-interest are at the heart of sin - and the genius of sin is that it's deceitful. Human being can hide their self-interest and selfishness so well that we end up even hiding it from ourselves.

A friend of mine who's a church-minister in Leicester once told me that he'd changed the way he asked people to take on a ministry of serving within the church family. He said: "I used to phone people

and say, ‘Look I’ve got this favour to ask, but do you think you might just possibly be able to...’”.

“Then I realised, he said, that that turned Christian service into a favour that people were graciously fitting into their lives - not, as it should be, the very heart-beat of a Christian’s life.”

Of course I’m not saying here that we measure Christian service by the number of jobs someone racks up in church. We all have different capacities and different responsibilities in life. But you see, don’t you, that the heart of healthy Christian service is in our attitude.

Let me give you some common responses you get from people towards serving Christ within a church family. And each one of them fails to show the same attitude of mind that Christ had.

Someone says: “I’m upset because not enough people thanked me for what I did.” In the end, that’s selfish ambition, isn’t it.

Or they say: “I know there’s a need, and I know I could make the time, but it’s not what I really want to do.”

But that’s looking to my own interests, not to the interests of others.

Someone else says: “I haven’t got the time”, when what they mean is: “I don’t want to make the time.”

Another one hangs back in serving because it won’t be done exactly the way they’d want it to be done - so they’d rather not bother.

Or someone who only really enjoys doing things up-front in church, but does nothing behind the scenes.

Let me say: if you feel a rebuke from the Lord in any of this, then be assured that I do for myself, too - and I’ve felt that rebuke from the Lord this week, from these words.

Let me also say: if you in good conscience are serving faithfully, trying to have the same humble servant-attitude that Christ did, then you should go home today rejoicing and encouraged.

Many of us filled in Gift-Day responses a couple of months ago. (Just to say: everyone will get a personal response from me - it’s just taking some time!).

A few people wrote on their forms: “I’ll serve wherever I’m needed.” I’m sure many others had that attitude as you filled in your form. That’s the same attitude of mind that Christ Jesus had. And I rejoice to see this value, “everyone serving Christ”, lived out in action often among us - and of course lived out in our homes, and where we work.

But if for you church is at all ‘drive-in’, or drive-through - you come to church or Home Group, you park up, you pay a little, you get what you want and then you go - then the solution is not to think that there’s a list of jobs you ought to do.

The solution is Christ: your servant and Lord - the solution is a renewed experience of a saving relationship with him.

It's only in that soil that we can grow a Christ-like servant-attitude,
and Christ-like servant-action.