

Serving Lovingly



We are often asked, expected, or we choose, to serve others. It could be in everyday life such as helping people at our workplace, or when it is our turn to cook and we serve a meal for those we live with, as shown above. Alternatively it could be choosing to serve as King Charles III publicly declared at his coronation service, when he offered his whole life to serve God and others. He prayed, “God of compassion and mercy, whose Son was sent not to be served but to serve, give grace that I may find in thy service perfect freedom, and in that freedom knowledge of thy truth. Grant that I may be a blessing to all thy children, of every faith and conviction, that together we may discover the ways of gentleness, and be led into the paths of peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

These moving words are connected to Matthew 20:26-28, when Jesus told his followers, “...whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” As Christians, we are reminded by King Charles’ words that we are all called each day to use our God given gifts to serve one another.

There are many ways to serve others, but we are to do it in the best and most careful way we can, showing respect and love. For example, when serving a meal for others, we shall cook the food well and arrange it attractively on a

plate. And, if we are listening to someone speaking, we shall give them our whole attention, and not start to read a message on our phone at the same time.

Sometimes serving can be costly. The story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35) is of a man despised by many Jews, who risked his own life when he showed love and care for an unknown victim of violence. We are more likely to experience something less dramatic, but still costly. Perhaps when we have planned for an enjoyable time in our garden, and are challenged to drive a stranger to a distant location and help them for the rest of the day.

At the Last Supper, Jesus washed his disciples' feet. He explained this action of serving by saying, "...if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." John 13:14. When we consider these words, we realise it is one thing for us to serve God and serve others, and even to be served by other people, but quite another to accept service from God! It is no wonder that in John 13:8 Peter strenuously protested when Jesus was about to wash his feet. In his culture, it was the task of a slave or a woman, not his Lord and Teacher. If we can accept being served by God, our Creator and Redeemer, we shall find that our relationship with God changes and deepens. Does this witness to something more profound than we had realised about the incarnation, God being born as one of us, a human being? Perhaps it also reveals more of God's amazing love for us?

To serve and be served by God and others, is an experience which in John 15:12-15, is shown to lead to two important changes in our relationships with God and others. First, Jesus' commanded his followers to love one another as "I have loved you," and that way of loving is important as it directs *how* we are to serve one another. Second, Jesus explained that being served by him no longer demonstrated a relationship between servants and their master, but one between friends.

In the prayer of King Charles, he indicated that he wanted to serve others in a way that enabled both himself and those served, together, to contribute to peace through "the ways of gentleness." Serving together to achieve a goal easily moves into being served by one another. Also, sometimes when we struggle to lovingly serve someone, we later realise that in the serving we have

received loving service from that person.

A loving mutual service offered and received from beside another has many benefits for those involved. Importantly, in such a relationship, domination, domestic violence and bullying, is undermined. Mutual serving expressed out of love also develops a friendship, and a sort of equality, between the participants, even when God is involved. When it is with God, we as God's children, made in the image of God, become friends with God, in God's love.

To sum up, as followers of Jesus, we are called to give ourselves for others, loving them, respecting them and desiring the best for them. Such a way of living is not always easy, but the Holy Spirit has been given to us to guide, strengthen and help us to achieve this task.

To love and serve God and one another, is the basis of our lives as Christians, members of Christ's body, in our world today. It is also how a caring community of people can become a loving and welcoming church, working for the good of all, including the whole of God's creation.

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