

Sunday September 20, 2020

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Welcome & Prayer (Ross L)

Good morning, welcome, thanks for being with us this morning. It's good to be together with more of us managing to make it back to church physically each week, and despite the restrictions that we've got, we can still have a chat, encourage each other and share how our weeks have gone. How was yours this last week? Good? Bad? Indifferent? What did you manage to do? If you heard Stephen's sermon last week you would have heard a hint of what we're looking at this week. Paul tells Titus that Jesus *redeemed us to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

How eager were you to do some good deeds during this last week? It's always interesting to reflect on the real reasons that people act the way they do. Why do we do good things? There are plenty of people around us who do good things. Are our reasons any different to theirs? There are those who do good and expect something in return. Remember Job's friends & the bad karma they talked about. I'm guessing that they had a similar view to the good things in life. Maybe it's because doing good increases your social network. Who has ever heard of a kind, generous person who doesn't have a great deal of friends? It's all about paying it forward & making others feel good or do we actually feel some innate moral responsibility? That we are all working towards becoming our 'best possible self' and that positive action (including kindness towards others) is crucial in increasing well-being. The Bible tells us that being good people is not enough. We need to be God's people doing his good works. So, as Stephen takes us through Titus 3 this morning, keep your ears and your hearts open, as we learn the real reasons for doing good this week.

Prayer. *Father, we are here today to say thank you. We want to thank you for the wonderful blessing of today. For the sleep that we've had, the air that we breathe, for the food that you provide for us. We want to thank you for the people you put around us. For family, for friends, for co-workers, for those that encourage us. We want to thank you for your word of hope that gives us strength. Thank you that you have given us the bible, for those who faithfully wrote it, for those who have preserved it and for those who help us understand it. We want to thank you for your love that makes our life meaningful. Without you we would struggle to find a meaning for life. There would be nothing to look forward to, nothing to hold onto. Thank you that you provide us with purpose. We want to thank you for your peace that gives us comfort. In this time of Covid, and other troubles that surround us, we know that you hold us close, and that that provides a peaceful haven in our busy lives. A place to go to rest in your comforting arms. We want to thank you for your grace that renews and restores our life. We know that by ourselves we cannot find a way back to you. We want your forgiveness and we crave a relationship with you. Forgive us, renew and restore us. Bring us back to you through your gift of grace. Open our hearts this morning to your leading and teach us of the good you would have us do.*

In Jesus' name, Amen

Song – Come People of the Risen King <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9j07fbld3uY>

Song – Jesus Christ is Risen Today <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkZ2aes2WfE>

Bible Reading – Titus 3:1-8 (NIV)

“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.³ At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his

mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸ This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.”

Announcements – 20th September

- **Church Services this term.** Each week there are about 10-15 spots available at our Charlestown morning services and around 5-10 spots available at our Sunday @ 6 services. Seeing most of us are not going to church as much as we did pre-COVID there is room for most of us to come at extra week per month. So, if you are currently not coming at all, why not try to come once a month? If you are coming once a month, why not come twice? That way we can all make the most of the opportunities we are given during these difficult days.
- **Face masks.** Currently the NSW State government strongly recommended that people wear Face masks if they attend places of worship but stopped short from saying you had to wear face masks. We would strongly recommend that you do wear Face masks in church at the current time. There will be some washable facemasks available from the back of the Church if you would like one.
- **Operation Christmas Child.** Our church is hoping to participate again in Christmas boxes for disadvantaged children overseas. Would you like to help by packing a shoe box for someone less fortunate than our own families? They can be picked up from the Church from today. You might consider being a part of this – a place to start would be watching this video <https://www.samaritanspurse.org.au/full-circle-graces-story/> Contact Kathryn O for more details on 0424 428 722
- **Focus for September – Sport/Leisure.** Sport is often seen as a god in our current world. People are just fanatical about their sport. They go all out in support for their team. And yet there are so few longer-term blessings from that sort of support. But doesn't that put some of us to shame though as Christians? Are we as committed to Christ as they are to their favourite players? Are we zealous for the church as they are for their team? ⁸ *“For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come”.* (2 Corinthians 4:18)
- **Prayer meetings.** Don't forget we now have just one prayer meeting for the church, each Monday at 7m on ZOOM. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89793950885>
- **Charlestown Work Day.** Please put Saturday 18th October in your diaries for a much-needed work day around the church. More details to come.
- **Training Event.** Sunday October 25 from 3-5pm via ZOOM or live at Church we will be having time to grow our skills (and grow the pool of people willing to use their skills) in all aspects of service in our services including sound, computer, music, leading, welcoming, bible reading and public praying)

Kids Talk – QUIZ WORX

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1tRkw147A2XrKslQ9_IzP0Amowt34P_0Y

Family Matters – Jo Barlow on Vaccines <https://youtu.be/eAOJfUX6ek>

Song – Micah Song https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYK5Kh_IzY

Prayer Points for Sunday 20th September 2020

Pray for Mali (Population 20 million, Christians 461,000). Islamic extremism has been steadily on the rise since the beginning of the civil war in 2012, particularly in the north of the country. Threats of attacks and kidnapping from extremist groups such as al-Qaeda are common. In June 2019, a predominantly Christian

village was attacked by heavily armed extremists. Approximately 100 believers lost their lives. Living openly as a Christian safely is nearly impossible, and sharing the gospel is extremely risky. Churches have been destroyed and believers have been displaced from their homes because they were known to have faith in Jesus. Muslims who convert to Christianity are especially vulnerable. Often keeping their faith a secret, fellowship and communal worship are difficult. To reveal Christian faith or to refuse to take part in Islamic rites may lead to serious consequences. The family of a Christian convert is likely to pressure them to deny Jesus and exclude them from the wider community.

COVID-19. Pray for the poorer countries struggling with inadequate hospital systems, lack of government finance, very little PPE and yet a growing number of COVID cases to deal with.

Pray for those in poverty in Australia. There should be enough to go around in the Lucky Country but there is a growing gap between the haves and the have nots. Pray that we will not forget those who are falling through the cracks.

Pray for our medical workers on the front line (especially those in our Church). With extra stress, protective equipment and paperwork, pray that they will continue to care for people in real need.

Pray for Christians in refugee camps in Sudan. A couple of years ago the Australian Presbyterian World Mission launched an appeal to supply Bibles for Christians who had lost everything escaping the ongoing civil war in South Sudan. Last weekend we received confirmation that 9,000 Bibles and 200 audio Bibles have been placed into the hands of the believers in the camps. Pray that they will be well used. For more information please look at the following video. <https://vimeo.com/451097255>

Bible Reading – Titus 3:9-15 (NIV)

⁹ But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. ¹⁰ Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. ¹¹ You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.

¹² As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there. ¹³ Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need. ¹⁴ Our people must learn to devote themselves **to doing what is good**, in order to provide for **urgent** needs and not live **unproductive lives**. ¹⁵ Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.

Sermon – Be Good <https://youtu.be/PR-P75yyo4>

I grew up in an era where you were told constantly to be good. As you went off to school the call from your mum was “Be good Stephen.” Or “Stephen, have a good day today”. There was an objective moral standard that was expected of people, we were to be good. One of the big songs in my youth was Men at Work’s Be good Johnny. It was about a boy who didn’t want to play sports or work at school, he just sat at his desk and daydreamed. But that wasn’t the right thing to do. Snap out of this world of yourself Johnny, Be good.

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Now I think that has changed. I don’t hear people say “Be good” anymore. Instead I hear the instruction “Stay strong, or keep safe or be yourself!” Be true to who you are. We no longer have this exterior moral standard of goodness to live up to. Instead we have an interior focus. Stay true to yourself. Look after yourself. Follow your heart. Be yourself.

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As we come to the end of this short letter to Titus, we are going to read Paul says to his young apprentice Titus three times that he should be good or do good. Verse 1, *“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready **to do whatever is good**”*. V8, *“And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves **to doing what is good.**”* And right at the end of the letter Paul says in v 14, *“Our people must learn to devote themselves **to doing what is good**, in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives”*.

Here is our major theme in this chapter. We are too do good. Be good. In our society, in our Church, in all our dealings with others. Each one of us need to be people who do

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1. Good Works (verses 1-2)

Verse 1, *“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready **to do whatever is good**,² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.”* And those good works start not here in the Church but out there in our society. We should be ready, eager to do whatever is good to help our common man. And that starts with how we relate to the government that is over us.

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We need to be subject to the rulers and authorities that are currently in place over us. We need to be obedient to them. In the words of Jesus, we need to *“render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and render to God what belongs to God.”* The rest of the Bible fills these directions out a little. You may not like those who are currently in power. They may or may not be doing good for the people under their rule. But God has placed the government of the day in its current position. And so, we are to be subject to their authority.

If Christians only respect the authority that they agree with, then they will create a problem that will come back to bite them. Because in the Church people won't always agree with God's word, or the preaching of God's word, or the decisions of God's chosen leaders. So, if we just submit to people we agree with, soon the Church itself will be a shambles as the authority figures that God has placed there will end up having no authority at all.

And Cretans, as we found out earlier in the letter, were unruly. They were liars, evil brutes, gluttons. They were not going to do what those in authority told them to do. And besides who was in authority at the time? Nero. Nero was the Caesar of the whole Roman Empire and his leadership was as corrupt as it could be. But in this context, Christians are to submit, be obedient, ready to do what is good.

What's more, they are not to bad mouth others, they are to avoid conflict with others by being peaceable and humble. They are to be known not by their fighting but by their gentleness. They are not just to do their own thing. They are not to stay safe in their holy huddle. They are to engage with their world. They are to bless their world. They are to be people ready to do good, even if the world throws back evil at them.

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I am reading at the moment a book by Natasha Moore and John Dickson, *“For the love of God – how the Church is better and worse than you can ever imagine.”* The material in its pages came out last year as a movie in the cinemas and its topics are all available on the internet at the [Centre for Public Christianity website](#). But in the book it highlights how often the church hasn't done good – for example the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the way that the Church has grown rich and greedy and treated some of its people shamefully.

But when you look at the history of the world there are times that Christians and the church have sown such goodness into our world that we have reaped a kinder, a more just and compassion society. People like William Wilberforce, Martin Luther, Florence Nightingale, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mother Theresa and many others have been on the forefront of waves of change that have made the world a better place.

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Christians are to do good works. They are to be good neighbours. The best citizens because of their faith. They are to avoid meaningless conflict. They are not to riot and rise up in armed conflict. They are to seek to bring about change in a peaceable and non-violent way. More like Martin Luther King than Malcolm X. It might take longer to achieve but planting seeds of peace and love will in God's time reap a crop of a more just and humane society.

These good works start in everyday life, in our home, in your workplace, your school, your neighbourhood. We will live the gospel before the people that we daily rub shoulders with. In the ordinary stuff of life. Then some will build on that in extraordinary ways to seek to change society as a whole. And it does need change. In recent years we have had the Me-Too movement and the Black Lives Matter protests both highlight systemic evil that needs to change. And the Christian will do their bit by being ready to do whatever is good.

I wonder what good works you have been doing lately? What fruit of Christian faith has been produced in your life in recent times? How have you been able to bring a measure of peace in your family? How are you going in your gentleness with those who have been aggressive to you? How do you feel about the restrictions the government is making over COVID? Are you OK with submitting to them? Paul wants to talk about Good works and then

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2. God's Work (verses 3-8)

Because Christians are not just good people. Christians are people who have been changed by God and as a response to what God has done in their lives now want to do good for God's sake. And so, Paul next highlights God's Work, God's work of salvation. Twice in the next paragraph we find that the dominant verb is salvation. Verse 5 "God saved us". *"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."*

Our good works come from God's great work of salvation. And it is a great work. A life changing work. An eternity impacting work. And if this is so then you and I really have to slow down and look at it from a number of different angles. And so even though salvation is Christianity 101 I want to look at the precious jewel of salvation from a number of angles.

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a) Starting with **the need of salvation**. Why did God have to do his work of our salvation in our lives? Because we were in such a bad spot that only God could get us out of it. You see before God's salvation came into play, our relationship with God was a mess. Verse 3 explains it for us. *"At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures."*

Now that doesn't sound very nice does it? We were foolish. But Paul is not talking about Attila the Hun, Adolf Hitler or Osama Bin Laden, here. He's talking about you and me. Without a personal relationship with Jesus we are foolish, because we are preoccupied with family or job or money or home and we are ignoring our Creator. We are disobedient because we are turning our back on our Maker and going our own way. We are deceived because Satan has blinded us to the truth of God's existence. We are enslaved by all sorts of passions and pleasures, as we live not for God but ourselves.

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In the Me-Too movement, people are standing up and saying I was a victim, but I don't want to be a victim anymore. But here Paul is starting a new movement, the We-Too movement. And in this movement, I was a victim as well, enslaved by all sorts of passions and influences all around me. But we too were also responsible. Because our thinking was wrong. Our relationship with God was stuffed up. And that also affected our relationships with others.

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"We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another." My thinking, my self-centredness means that I wasn't thinking about being good but being myself. And I know, and you should know as well, that although there is good stuff within me there is also stuff that is rotten to the core. And God knows that. Even if we try and deceive ourselves to the truth. And so, you and I and everyone else have a need for salvation. A need for God to step in and save us. But imagine for a moment God creating a list of pros and cons in saving us?

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Have you ever done? You have a decision to make and so you try and weigh up the evidence for doing something against the evidence of not doing the same thing. Well what are on the cons side for God, what reasons are there for him not to save us but to condemn us? Well we are foolish, we are disobedient, we are deceived, we are enslaved, malicious, envious, hatred and hating. Not a good start, is it?

So why should God save us, what are on the pros side? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. So, God doesn't say on balance I think there are more pros than cons, I think that Stephen has some potential. No, it's not like that at all. But there is one reason and one reason only why God would save us - God's nature. ⁴*"But when the **kindness & love of God** our Saviour appeared,⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."*

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b) That's **the source of Salvation**. If we were truly deceived and enslaved, one thing is obvious, we could not save ourselves. But we don't save ourselves. Our good works can never save ourselves. Our good personality can never save us. God has to save us. The source of our salvation is God Himself. The source is his kindness, his love, his mercy, his grace. God took the initiative. God reached out to us in our desperate need. God rescued us from our hopeless position.

Before I became a Christian in my late teenage years, I was a hardworking, conscientious, good-living youngster. But I was still foolish and disobedient, deceived and enslaved. And so, God did something about it. He sent me;

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c) **The agent of Salvation**, His Holy Spirit. *"He (that is God) saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously."* The Holy Spirit was the one who changed my thinking. The Holy Spirit was the one who washed my heart. The Holy Spirit was the one who renewed my life. The Holy Spirit came into my life and changed everything. Everything.

On TV we have these renovation shows, where some good person, stuck in an old and ugly house have a group of people come and it give their house a complete makeover. They didn't have the money to be able to do it themselves. They don't the time or the effort or the skills to transform where they are living. Someone else comes in and does it for them. And that's what happened to me. That's what happens to every Christian person.

God sends us the Holy Spirit to do the work that we could not possibly do. To lead us to repentance. To give us a rebirth. To renew our lives. And that leads Paul to next turn to;

d) **The means of Salvation.** *“He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace”.* It's by God's grace. It's not by our Good Works, it's by God's work. It's by the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

The cross was the time when Jesus took the sins of the world on his shoulders. At the cross God punished Jesus not for the sins that he had himself committed but because I had been foolish, you had been disobedient, the guy around the corner has been deceived and because your best friends were enslaved by passion and pleasure. At the cross the innocent took the place of the guilty, the sinless for the sinful. Jesus substituted himself for us. He was the *means* of our salvation. There was no other way to be saved. So, what then is

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e) **The goal of Salvation.** Verse 7 says *“so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”* God's goal is to make you His *heirs*, his sons and daughters. His purpose is to give us hope in this life and for the life to come. God wants to live with us for ever, for all eternity. He wants us to be a part of his family. That's his goal. To call a people out of this world who will love with him. And the result of all this? What is

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f) **The fruit of salvation.** Good Works. *“This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.”*

A saved person will devote themselves to doing what is good. They will not be saved by their good works, notice that. But once saved, they will reorientate their lives so that they live now for God. The proof, the fruit of our salvation is that we practice what we preach, that our lives are full of the good works God has prepared for us to do. Good works like living at peace with others. Good works like being gentle with others. Submitting to those in authority. And wanting others who are currently foolish and deceived and enslaved by all sorts of things to also experience God's salvation. As we have experienced God's salvation.

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And what a salvation. A salvation that needed every aspect of God's nature to achieve. For it was God the Father who designed our salvation. It was God the son, Jesus who purchased our salvation and it was God the Spirit who applies our salvation. It is a salvation that in the past we were forgiven and renewed. In the present we live a life of good works. And in the future, we look forward to the hope of heaven.

It is a salvation that is historical because it is based on the historical death and resurrection of Jesus. It is experiential as God actually comes into our lives in the form of his Holy Spirit to change and renew us. And it is eternal for it is good not just for this life but the life to come.

Friends whichever way you look at it, from whichever angle you approach it, this salvation is amazing, truly amazing. That's the work of God in our lives. That is the heart of what we believe. That is completely life changing. World changing even. But has it changed your world? Has it rocked it completely? Does it fuel your average day? Does it power you on to serve God all the time? God's work leads to Good works which in turn leads to;

3. Gospel Work (verses 9-15)

And the first aspect of gospel work that Paul tells Titus about is how to deal with those who are argumentative. ⁹*“But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. ¹⁰ Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. ¹¹ You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.”*

God’s work should promote peace so if there are people around you stirring up trouble, we need to do something about it. And quick-smart. For there are some things that are incompatible with grace. And so, we are to stress the teachings of the gospel and avoid teachings on law. We are to stress things that show that saved lives lead to good works and avoid teachings that just lead to words, to arguments that are unprofitable and useless.

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If we are to be gospel people then at the heart of what we talk about is the gospel itself. God’s gracious offer of salvation. And in every Church, I have been in there are people that are not satisfied with that. That want to move on from that. And so instead of doing the work of God they get tied up with the last Days, or obscure verses of Scripture, the history of their denomination or even just the colour of the carpet in the Church.

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And Paul says if people are doing this there it is a three strikes policy and then they are out. Warn them. Warn them a second time. And then have nothing to do with them. This is gospel work, hard work that our leaders tend to do behind the scenes. Work whose aim is not punishment but repentance and restoration. And it is important work, work that takes its toll. Some of the hardest things I have ever done is to be involved in church discipline. Anyone who has ever done it can show you their scars.

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But gospel work is important. And so, Paul heads away from the problems and onto the opportunities of gospel work. And its work that we need to do together. ¹²*“As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there”*. Titus is building on the work of the apostle Paul and he will soon hand over the reins of this Church to either Artemas or Tychicus.

We are not one-man-bands. Gospel ministry is way beyond the scope of one person. Paul sends two people to Crete and he desires Titus to come back from Crete. Like a general with a battle board in front of him, Paul will do whatever is best for the work of the gospel. Now Titus time in Crete is coming to an end but the work of the gospel will continue to the end.

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But before Titus goes, ¹³*“Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need.”* Paul knows these guys are going to pass through onto other avenues of ministry. And they will need the Church’s help. For it is not just about us and our church. It is about what God is doing throughout the world. And so, we need to have a wider focus than our own back yard. We need to have a gospel focus, a worldwide focus. There is gospel work elsewhere to be done that also needs our support.

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For that is also what is like to do good. To provide for the urgent needs all around us. To live productive lives. It is not just doing good works in society. It is not just responding to God’s work in your own situation. It is doing gospel work. So that more and more people can hear the good news of salvation. Can have the chance to hear about and see in action God’s grace. For that is what good works should do. They don’t point to ourselves; they point to God and His work in our lives. And if we do that, we will be productive in all that we do.

Let me conclude with a story. A young man was walking along the seashore. Ahead of him, he saw a distant figure: someone who was walking, but who paused every few steps, stooped down, and seemed to be throwing something into the sea. His curiosity aroused, he hurried ahead and he noticed that there was literally thousands of starfish there stranded by the tide and an old man was picking up the odd one and throwing it back into the ocean.

"Why are you doing this?" he gasped. "You can't save all of these starfish! It's useless! What does it matter?" The old man paused for a moment, looking down at the crusty starfish he'd just picked up & answered. "It matters to this one," he said, as tosses it back into the sea. God's salvation matters to the ones God is saving. If it matters to you, it matters equally to others. So, grace be with you all. And may you share that grace with all you meet today.

Song – Cornerstone

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcbz0FSM4R0>

Song – Standing on the promises https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVeHDun_oEQ

Benediction

⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸ This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.

Morning Tea

Our morning tea is a vital way that we give and receive fellowship during a time like this. We don't want to be just consumers of Church; we want to be a part of the family of God. So why not give one or two people a call. Who might your ring now?