

**Sunday November 29, 2020**

## **Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church**

### **Welcome & Prayer (Ross L)**

Are you a builder? Were you, apparently like John Jobse, born carrying a toolbox, and the skills to use everything inside? Or are you one of those, still struggling to choose between a hammer and a screwdriver, even though you need an allen key, when faced with your latest flatpack from IKEA? Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3, has no doubt about our abilities and says that we are all builders. We have been given a solid foundation upon which to build and we are to continue the construction. He calls us to use the best materials, to build skilfully and to build buildings that will stand the test of time. God is the building inspector and is looking for quality workmanship. So as Stephen takes us through a master builder's class today, take note, to ensure that your building skills are up to scratch and that, when the time comes, whatever you're building will survive the inspector's scrutiny.

*Prayer. Father, we want to come to you today because you are our strength and salvation. we want to say thank you for giving us life and for bringing us back to you. You are majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, full of unfailing love. You lead us through the good times and the bad. Our source of never-ending hope. You are our stronghold, our refuge and our saviour. We come today to seek forgiveness for the ways in which we have failed you in this last week; for the selfishness we have shown, for the times we have ignored you, for the ways in which we have hurt others. Bring us back to you this morning, help us to honour you and to praise your name. Give us ears that will listen and humble our hearts to hear your word so that we will know how to serve you in the coming week Amen*

**Songs: This is amazing grace** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjXjkbODrro>  
**Glory be to God the Father** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nb4pDE52Wxo>

### **Bible Reading – 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 (NIV)**

*Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly – mere infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. <sup>3</sup> You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? <sup>4</sup> For when one says, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,' are you not mere human beings? <sup>5</sup> What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. <sup>6</sup> I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. <sup>7</sup> So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. <sup>8</sup> The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour. <sup>9</sup> For we are fellow workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.*

### **Announcements**

- **Church.** This week we reach another milestone. With 225 spots available each Sunday we are now inviting people to come each and every week they want to come to Church. This means we will still be registering a spot each week but we will send everyone an invitation to register twice a week – at the beginning of the week and each Thursday night. Our aim is to fill every spot across the whole church by Christmas. Then we will consider our next move
- **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.

- **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>
- **Focus for December – Christmas.** After an incredibly difficult year how can we point people to the hope of our Saviour this Christmas time? One way is to invite them along to our Christmas services. For the first time in many years we will also be having Christmas Eve services. Our plan is
  - **Christmas Eve**            **6pm**            **Swansea**  
   **6pm**            **Charlestown**
  - **Christmas Day**           **8:15am**       **Charlestown**  
   **9:30am**       **Charlestown**

We will need to register for these services and we want to leave some spaces for the community who might just turn up on the day. But right now you might begin to think and pray about who you might invite along to Church over Christmas

- **Financial News.**
  - Budget Offerings for October            \$21,864
  - Actual Offerings for October            \$25,126
  - Surplus for October                        \$ 3, 638
  - Surplus for Jan-Oct                         \$48,536

We have so much to be thankful to God for this year. One of which is that our people have been extremely generous with their giving and have provided the Church with the financial resources it needs to do ministry in these difficult times.

- **Sermon Series – AM services.** Unusual images of the Church. They will include the following
  - 29/11            A worksite of builders                        1 Corinthians 3
  - 5/12            A ship of fools                                    2 Corinthians 11
  - 12/12           A pile of rubbish                                1 Corinthians 4
  - 3/1             A persistence (or embarrassment!) of parents    1 Thessalonians 2
- **Sunday School Presentation** will look a little different to previous years. It will held on Sunday December 6th. There will be a normal church service at 10:30 and a Kids Church that runs parallel at the same time. At the end of that time we will gather outside the hall where the Kids Church will present to us a memory verse they have been learning and prizes will be given to all the kids in attendance. If you are a family please try and come that week and the week before for a practise for the kids. And if you are not a family why not come to one of the services AND come around the back at 11:30am and support our gospel work among our young people
- **JOY** will be held this Friday from 10am at the 16 footers.
- **Church Camp.** Session has decided not to go away next year for the church camp. At this stage we are planning to have a teaching weekend based in Charlestown in its place. More details to come.
- **Lords Supper** will be celebrated at our morning services on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> December and for Sunday @ 6 on Sunday 13th December
- **Wee Waa Hampers.** Please drop your Christmas food at the front of the Church by NEXT SUNDAY. We will then pack them into hampers and send them off via Ean to Wee Waa in early December. Also cash donations can be made through the plate or by electronic banking, but please remember to mark it "Wee Waa". For any enquiries, ring Ean Sutton on 0419 984 948

## Song – Reformation Hymn

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiDw12zR814>

## Prayer

Heavenly Father, we praise you for loving us, saving us, and adopting us as your children. WE thank you for Jesus. That we are in Him. And he is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Everything we need for life and salvation is found in him. He is the foundation of the church. We thank you for the gift

of faith. And for revealing to us the gospel by your Spirit. Help us to grow in grace and knowledge. Help our lives to be more dedicated to you.

Father we pray for this lost world. WE know you love this world because you gave your only Son. We thank you that he is the light to the gentiles. And the hope of all nations. We pray for the country of Bangladesh. Which is surrounded by a lot of darkness. We ask that believers there would be filled with all joy and peace in believing. That in the midst of despair they would abound in hope by the Holy Spirit. We ask that you would deliver many people from darkness and transfer them into the kingdom of your Son.

God of hope, we pray for countries hit hard by the pandemic that you would have mercy on them. We pray for a vaccine to be created soon and in an ethical way. We pray that those suffering from job loss and loneliness would find hope and joy in you. We pray that the message of Christmas would come powerfully this year too many people. We thank you for the low case numbers in Australia and pray that would continue. We ask for the restrictions in churches to ease so we can all meet together and sing again.

Father we pray for the Gingerbread house hubs. Give those involved courage to invite people around. Fill them with love for the lost. Help them to tell of the hope they have in Jesus and people would respond with faith and repentance. God of compassion, we pray for those in nursing homes. Have mercy on them. We pray for the Christian nursing homes in particular. Protect from the virus. Comfort the sick and lonely. Help the chaplains to preach the word and comfort the dying with the gospel truths. Save your people.

Lord we pray for those who are out on the streets that they would be cared for and hear and know of your love. Thank you that you love sinners and sent your Son to die for us. Lift our eyes up to him, to where our help comes from. We commit our lives into your faithful hands. In Jesus name. Amen.

## **Bible Reading – 1 Corinthians 3:9-17 (NIV)**

*<sup>9</sup>For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.<sup>10</sup> By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. <sup>11</sup>For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup>If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, <sup>13</sup>their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. <sup>14</sup>If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. <sup>16</sup>Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? <sup>17</sup>If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.*

## **Sermon – A worksite of Builders** [https://youtu.be/Jd\\_ABsx9A4U](https://youtu.be/Jd_ABsx9A4U)

Ever since I arrived as the minister of this parish, we have been talking in our Committee of management about a building project. For over 15 years there has been moves afoot to redevelop the Charlestown Church site and put in a 6 story building. Plans have been drawn up. Council requirements met. Finance looked into. But for one reason or another construction has never started. Which is why over the last year or two the committee have looked at more modest plans. Not a knock down and build up as a replacement but ways & means of making additions to what we have to better cater for our present and our future.

Slide 2

But that is not the only building project going on in this Church. And quite frankly it is nowhere near the most important building project going on here. For our passage in 1 Corinthians is telling us that God is building something far more important than a Church building, he is building a Church. A temple in fact

made up of his people filled with His Spirit. It is a sacred undertaken. It is a structure that will last forever. And no matter what fire storm is going to hit the Church it will survive because God will enable to survive.

Slide 3

So this morning we are entering onto a construction site. So I want us all to put on our hard hats and our high viz clothing. Turn up with your work apron on, with a hammer and some nails in your belt. For we are a Church under construction. As we look around we all should see that we are a worksite, filled with builders, architects, plumbers, electricians, glaziers, roofers and plenty of manual labourers. So let's roll up our sleeves and start working. But

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### 1. What are we Building on? (verses 10-11)

*"For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building."* We are working on God's building. It's not our Church. It's not the Presbyterian Church. It's God's Church. God's field. God's building. God was in the construction business first. He created the universe out of nothing. And what He built was good, very good. But his most ambitious building project in all his history is his Church. Amongst his people he is building a temple, a spiritual house where spiritual sacrifices are being presented. And the materials he is using for this mega construction is us. We are the living stones being built into a holy temple.

Slide 5

God's the builder. And he can fix it. In fact He will fix it. Jesus says in the gospels to Peter, the rock, *"I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it!"* The Lord declares in Psalm 127 *"Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain."* We may be builders, but we are sub contractors. We are obliged to follow the foreman Jesus orders, we need to follow God's architectural designs. We are not free to build how and when we want.

Slide 6

And so Paul tells us what the building plans say. He goes on to say, <sup>10</sup>*"By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. <sup>11</sup>For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."* Its starts with grace. Of course it starts with grace. God's grace. If it is God's building then it can't begin with our works or our faith or our skills or our thinking. The Church is not our Church, It is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Established by his death on the cross. Founded upon the grace that God has given us in his son.

Slide 7

So Paul says I laid the only foundation that was capable of holding such a massive undertaking. And that foundation is Jesus Christ. Not on doctrine. Not on buildings. Not on wisdom. Not on relevance. Not on entertainment. Not on friendship. These things may be a part of the superstructure. But the foundation has got to be Jesus Christ.

So the foundation is already here, so we don't need to lay it again. We don't start each Church by scratch. We don't work up a new set of plans. We build upon what the apostles, the prophets, the Scriptures have already laid down. Jesus. Only Jesus can take the weight, the pressure of a worldwide family of believers. The Church is built on Jesus because every member of God's Church has their lives build upon the rock that is Jesus Christ. He is their cornerstone. We sing *"On Christ the solid rock I stand; for all other ground is sinking sand."*

Now of course the Church has Jesus as its foundation. Every Church would say that it has Jesus as its foundation. But do they? Just over 18 months ago, cracks started appearing in the car park, around the lift shafts and even in some apartments in the Mascot Towers complex. The building was evacuated, structural engineers were brought in and the findings were that the foundations were faulty. The building looked good. Others had given it a tick of approval. But deep below there were problems, real problems

Slide 8

Paul has laid for us the foundations and others have come and built upon that foundation. But they need to build with care for no one can lay any foundation other than the one laid, which is Jesus Christ. So the question Paul wants to ask us today is what are we building on here in this Church? And it can't be on our denominational structure. And it can't be on our leadership. And it can't be on our traditions. It has to be on Jesus Christ.

And that is true also of our own individual lives. We must be building our lives on the rock that is Jesus Christ. We must be resting on the only thing that is able to stand the pressures of the modern world. And yet Paul is not really talking about us as individuals here, he is talking about us as a worksite of builders. As the Church of the living God. And each one of us should build with care. Each one of us has a part to play on this construction site. We need to know what we are building upon and secondly we need to consider

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## **2. What we are building with? (Verses 12-13)**

So *"each one should be careful how he builds.... If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light."*

Slide 10

What that means is that the foundation must control the materials used in the superstructure. Otherwise the connection between verses 10 and 11 makes no sense. Does it make sense to say: Watch out what kind of windows you use because the foundation is Christ! Watch out what kind of roof you build because the foundation is Christ? Watch out what kind of wiring you use because the foundation is Christ!

Yes it does make sense if the foundation controls the shape and quality of the building. And that is the point: There is only one foundation: Christ. And so it is Jesus who controls the shape and quality of the church. So not only is he at the bottom of it all holding it all up; his influence must be utterly pervasive within the whole superstructure.

Slide 11

That is why we have to be careful with our choice of our materials. Paul contrasts two types of materials - the gold, the silver, the costly stones; with the wood, the hay and the straw. The first group are valuable, the next group are of a lesser worth. The first group will last, the second group will deteriorate. The first group were beautiful and special while the second group are ordinary and plain. The first group are the sort of materials used in the Temple, the second group were used in ordinary houses. The first group will make it through the fire, the second group will be destroyed by the fire.

All this goes on to say that we should build with the sort of materials God wants us to build with. We have to follow his master plan. We are to use things that are valuable, not the left overs. We are to do things that will last generations, not be thrown away in a disposable society. We are to make something substantial as a Church for what we are doing as God's people could last for all eternity.

Slide 12

And what lasts for eternity? But people. Living stones. Not really committees unless they affect people. Not really teaching Kids Church unless they shape our young people. Not really raising money unless that money is converted into building up the people of God. If we are not building up people in the faith, helping bring people to faith then really we are just painting over the cracks. We are just plastering over a wall of cardboard. And that is not going to survive. Remember our work will be shown up on the last day.

But let's dig a little deeper. How do we grow our people? How do we help the Church grow in number and in godliness? Well it's the word of God isn't it? Listen to how Solomon puts it in the book of Proverbs.

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Proverbs 3. *“Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, <sup>14</sup>for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. <sup>15</sup>She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her.”*

Proverbs 8. *“Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, <sup>11</sup>for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.”*

Proverbs 2. *“My son, if you accept my words & store up my commands within you, <sup>2</sup>turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding— <sup>3</sup>indeed, if you call out for insight & cry aloud for understanding, <sup>4</sup>and if you look for it as for silver & search for it as for hidden treasure <sup>5</sup>then you will understand the fear of the LORD & find the knowledge of God”*

Do you get it? God’s word is more valuable than silver and gold and rubies. And God’s wisdom will grow God’s Church. It is the raw material that builds upon the foundation of Jesus Christ because it is all about Jesus Christ. So the more we know about God’s word and the more we live out the truth of God’s word, the more we build on the foundation of Jesus.

Slide 14

Winston Churchill once said “We shape our buildings, then our buildings shape us.” And that is what the apostle Paul is saying to us here today. What we build our church with will ultimately shape our lives. So use the costly, the permanent, the beautiful, the materials that were used in the OT temple. For God’s word was the centre of that building & God’s word needs to be the centre of all we do in the Church of the living God. Because have to ask

Slide 15

### **3. What building will survive? (verses 14-15)**

For there is a day coming where each building will have a final inspection. And the quality of the work of each member of the construction site will be brought to light. They used to say that a carpenter can hide his mistakes but a doctor has to bury his. Well we might try and hide our workmanship and the types of materials that we have used to help grow God’s church but one day God is going to set his building on fire. And everyone will see the quality of our work and what will survive and what will be destroyed by the flames.

*“It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. <sup>14</sup>If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.”*

Slide 16

Last summer bushfires ravaged many parts of Australia. And it was interesting seeing the results of those firestorms. For many of the houses were completely destroyed but not all of them. Some home owners were well prepared. They had constructed their homes from materials that didn’t easily catch alight. They had removed leaves from their gutters and trees from around their properties. They had sprinkler systems installed. And that was enough for some to save their houses.

For a bushfire is the ultimate test. Has this house been built with such catastrophic conditions in mind? And similarly on the last day, the Church will face a catastrophic day of testing. And all those who are in the Church, all of us who are believers will have our work well and truly tested. The quality of our work will be tested. And the materials used in building up the Church will also be tested. Fire will be God’s ultimate building inspector.

Slide 17

And much of what you and I have done in this life will not survive. Let’s just think about that for a moment. At the final judgement you and I will be judged. Our lives will come under scrutiny. For our work for the

Lord Jesus and His body, the Church, will be put to the test. So what have we done? How much effort did we put in? What part of what we have done is going to last for all eternity?

You see it's not amount of work that you have done that is important. It is not how busy you have been. It's the quality of your work. It's the materials you used in your work, that's what is important. Some of us haven't even found our way onto the worksite. We haven't even valued the work of the Church enough even it to make it to the site orientation. Others started their work well but they became disappointed or disillusioned or hurt by their fellow workmates. While others have invested heavily in the people in the Church and will be rewarded for all their hard work on the last day.

But please note Paul is not talking about the reward for these peoples' works is their salvation. The Bible is clear we are saved by grace not our good works. And besides these people whose works are of a poor quality they lose all that they have done and yet are still saved as one escaping through the flames. This is not the test to see whether you are saved or not. This is a test to see whether what we have done once saved will last into all eternity.

Slide 18

You see every Christian will get to heaven, but not every Christian will have the same reward in heaven. Some will build poorly and will have nothing to show for a lifetime of faith. Others will have invested in the Church, in people's growth in faith, in people coming to faith and those people and their godliness will last into all eternity. Yes there are rewards for your works. And those rewards seem to be, not salvation itself, but we will see what God did with all our feeble efforts for other people. We will see how God used them to build his Church. To build up his people and his kingdom.

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Now this concept has puzzled many Christians over the years and we have to say we don't really know how this will all work out. But let me share with you some thoughts from Jonathon Edwards, the American preacher and theologian, who pondered this passage particularly closely and put down his thoughts in one of his many notebooks.

*"The saints, Christians, are like so many vessels of different sizes cast into a sea of happiness. Where every vessel is full, this is eternal life, for a man forever to have his capacity filled. But after all, tis left to God's sovereign pleasure. Tis His prerogative to determine the largeness of the vessel."*

Do you get that? He's saying we're like different sized containers and our works in this life, in Jesus' name, determine the size, the capacity of each container. So picking up some thoughts from this passage he is saying that the more we work for God and build up his church and use the materials that God has supplied us for the task, the more we grow our own vessels. Which means some vessels will be bigger than others and some smaller than others. If we have built with costly materials then we have grown not just the Church but our capacity to receive blessing from God. And if we have built with cheaper materials any renovations we do to our vessels will not make them any bigger.

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Edwards then concludes his thoughts with this prayer *"I want that vessel to be as deep and wide with a capacity as full as I can make it that I may have as much of Christ as it is possible for me to have in the world to come."*

What a wonderful thought. Not that what we do determines whether we are saved or not. Not that anyone of us will be less than filled with Christ into eternity. Somehow our vessels grow bigger, our bigger cup can be filled with even more of Christ. Because everywhere we look in heaven we see how God used our weak & feeble efforts to grow his people in Christ.

Slide 21

How did the missionary CT Studd put it? *“Only one life twill soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.”* And that is true for all of us. You may not be a great leader or teacher or evangelist. You might think that no one will remember you or your contributions. But when you rang up that person who was struggling with their faith and helped them put their trust in Jesus. When you sat with the person who was struggling with the loss of a loved and you prayed for them. When you opened your mouth at work or school and stood up for Jesus. You were building on the foundation of Jesus Christ with costly materials. And that work will last for all eternity. So friends don’t forget

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#### 4. What we are building?

<sup>16</sup>*“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? <sup>17</sup>If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.”*

We are not building a physical building we are helping to build up God’s people. We are building up the Church. Our spiritual gifts according to 1 Corinthians 14 are to be used to build up the body of Christ and strengthen one another in the faith. This is not just a call for the elders and teachers to do this job, even though they have extra privileges and responsibilities in this matter. It is up to all of us to it. And to do it together as a team. A worksite full of builders, plumbers, carpenters and manual labourers.

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A number of years ago a book by Derek Copley was published with the great title *“Building with bananas.”* Inside the front cover were these words. *“Why not admit it? We are all bent – more or less. So how can we fit snugly alongside each other in the fellowship of the local church? Timorous, aggressive, sluggish, hyperactive, submissive, rebellious – Christians are all these in turn and even at the same time.”*

And yet God will bring us together and build something that will last forever. That’s how God feels about the Church. That’s how he feels about you and I. So make sure that you are singing from the same song sheet. Make sure you have the same building plans in front of you that he does. For if you don’t build but you destroy. If you don’t encourage maybe you are discouraging. If you don’t get involved & if you leave it to someone else. If you spend all your time on yourselves and no time on your fellow believers then Paul ends by saying this.

Slide 24

If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. That’s how seriously God takes this building project. That the honour of being part of his church but also the responsibility as well. So be careful how you build. Remember the foundation that you are building on. And never ever forget that this is the most important task that he gives all his children to do in their lives. To be a worksite full of builders, helping build the Church.

Slide 25

I’m reminded of the cathedral in Barcelona, designed by Antonio Gaudi, called de la Sagrada Familia. It was begun in 1883 but was never finished due to his sudden death in 1926. However after his death the task of completing this incredible building was restarted & still continues today. It’s actually been suggested that it’ll never be finished. Now that’s not far off the picture of the church we have here, is it? It’s a building that continues to be built with every new generation. And the plans this morning have been given to you & me.

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So can we recapture that vision today of the Church? If you are not in Church today you can still build the Church. You might not be able to sing but you can still speak to one others words of encouragement. You might not be able to do what you once did but you can still pray and support a fellow believer. You might not have much time but you can still use that time wisely. In short God wants to use you to build his Church. Now where is my hard hat?



**Song – Cornerstone**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3HH\\_\\_-1Zbs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3HH__-1Zbs)

**Song – My hope is built**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkMapZB8qMk>

## **Benediction**

*<sup>9</sup>For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building*

## **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?