

Sunday December 13, 2020

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Welcome & Prayer (Jon B)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. This morning we continue our series on the Church. I wonder how you would respond if someone called you 'a fool'? My guess is that you'd be pretty upset! But what about if they called you a fool for Christ's sake? Would you still be upset? There is no need to be. The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but for us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18). This is God's wisdom. He chose the weak to shame the strong. He chose the low things over the high things. Suffering before glory. And so, for us who follow Jesus we expect to suffer now. We expect to be treated badly. Like the disciples we should count it joy to suffer for the sake of His name.

Let's begin with prayer that God would give us a deeper understanding of the cross today: Lord, your wisdom revealed in the gospel is astounding. The cross which is the ultimate sign of weakness and suffering is your power to save us and bring us to glory. Lord forgive us for wanting the glory without the suffering. For wanting an easy comfortable life over a costly one. For often complaining about our trials rather than counting them joy. Forgive us for despising the cross in this way. Give us the mind of Christ and help us to humble ourselves. Help us to crucify the flesh. Fill us with joy as we follow our Master. Help us to see that everything we need for life and salvation is found in Christ. And make us to boast in him alone in His name we pray. Amen

Song – Sooner count the stars https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nw_VAnvAyvs

Song – How great thou art <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cc0QVWzCv9k>

Bible Reading – 1 Corinthians 4:1-8 (NIV)

4 This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. ² Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. ³ I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. ⁴ My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵ Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God. ⁶ Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, 'Do not go beyond what is written.' Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other. ⁷ For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? ⁸ Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign – and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you!

Announcements

- **Church.** From TODAY we will be able to double our capacity for each of our services – 49 at Swansea and just over a 100 for Charlestown. And we will be able to sing if we have a mask! What great news. Over the coming weeks we will reconsider our approach to registering, paper and interactive services. If you have any thoughts about keeping these things or dropping them please talk to one of the elders.
- **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.

Bible Reading – 1 Corinthians 4:9-21 (NIV)

⁹ For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. ¹⁰ We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honoured, we are dishonoured! ¹¹ To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. ¹² We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; ¹³ when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world – right up to this moment. ¹⁴ I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. ¹⁵ Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. ¹⁶ Therefore I urge you to imitate me. ¹⁷ For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. ¹⁸ Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. ¹⁹ But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. ²⁰ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. ²¹ What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?

Sermon – A garbage tip of rubbish!

https://youtu.be/Xe0ER_Ldl3A

Heinz Kuluke went from a Professor of Philosophy in his native Germany to a garbage hunter in the Philippines. Now that's not particularly upwardly mobile is it? But he did it for a reason. He wanted to reach the people of Cebu in the Philippines who live, actually live, on the garbage dump for Christ.

Slide 2

You see the poorest of the poor in that place live on the garbage dump. There are about 625 families in all who survive by digging with their bare hands to find anything of value. They fill their sacks with plastic, glass, metal and all sorts of rubbish. When they fill a hamper, they receive three pesos, a dollar or so in return. And with that they can buy rice to survive. So, they live on the tip, pregnant women give birth in and around the tip and so that is where you will find Heinz Kuluke.

Slide 3

When he first arrived, Heinz wondered how he could reach these people for Christ. So, after delivering his philosophy classes at the university he rode his motorcycle, following a garbage truck that took him to one of the city's 4 dumps. He took a backpack full of medical equipment and began to treat the children working there. But they were suspicious of him.

So, after a while he changed tact. Just like everyone else he took a hook and started collecting recyclable materials. But he was hopeless at it. And after a number of days the children in particular felt sorry for him and helped him to fill his basket. They taught him how to scrounge. Heinz decided to then move to the dump and since then he has shared with them their food, diseases, hobbies and Jesus.

Slide 4

Now I don't know about you but that is one of the most remarkable stories I have ever heard. Imagine the world being your oyster and you choose to live among the discarded oyster shells. Imagine leaving your home, your country, your lifestyle, literally everything to reach the lost for Christ. It's staggering. But isn't that a picture of Jesus? Leaving heaven to come to earth? Leaving a perfect relationship with God to fill his life with imperfect relationships with others? And he is calling us today to take up our cross and follow him.

In 1 Cor 4, the apostle Paul is urging the Corinthian Church to imitate him as he models for them the way of life in Christ Jesus. And we are going to see that for Paul that means being a servant, a spectacle, slandered & scorned. He was even willing to become the scum of the earth. For those steps are the solution to the

Corinthians biggest problem. You see they were overtaken by the sin of pride & to such a major problem, a radical solution is proposed

Slide 5

And you and I need to understand that we have the very same problem. Pride. We think we are pretty good. Look at us. We have good jobs. Nice clothes. Comfortable homes. Skills and abilities. And we believe in Jesus. We are children of God. Chosen before the creation of the world. Really, we are doing pretty well for ourselves, aren't we?

Slide 6

But have we fallen for the worst sin there is? Pride. CS Lewis once said *"According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastely, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind...it is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began."*

Slide 7

Elsewhere Lewis said this devastating statement. *"As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you."*

Now the Corinthian church were proud. Just look at some of the words that Paul uses to describe them in this chapter. In verses 3-5 he critiques the way they judge others. And we only judge others if in some way we think we are better than them. In verse 6 he warns them they are getting puffed up, too big for their boots. And in verse 18, he describes them as arrogant in attitude and in talk. So, what is the solution to pride? Remembering they are

Slide 8

1. Servants (verse 1-5)

The way Paul deals with the pride issue in his own life is that he continually reminds himself of who he is. *"This, then, is how you ought to regard us: **as servants of Christ** and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. ² Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."*

Yes, Paul is an apostle, an evangelist, a Church planter, someone who at this very moment is writing Scripture, writing the word of God that will help shape the people of Corinth, the people of Lake Macquarie, the people all over the world. But really all he is, is a servant of Christ! Someone that has been entrusted with a task. Someone who needs to be faithful.

Slide 9

For Heinz Kuluke being a missionary, a professor of philosophy was never going to make one iota of difference to the people that God was calling him to minister to. So, he moved in with them, worked with them, in order to serve them. What a way to break the grip of pride in your life! To live on the garbage tip. To get tips on collecting a dollar's worth of rubbish from the 7-10-year olds that are working there.

But maybe Paul is onto something here. I find it hard to serve some people and I find it harder when I do that and they treat me as a servant. There are people in the Church that I find hard to serve, there are people in my family and in my community that I don't always want to serve. But to serve God I have to learn to stop serving myself. And to stop serving myself I need to remember who I am. I like Paul am a servant. And I like the Corinthians are

Slide 10

2. Also a Sovereign (verses 6-8)

⁸*"Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign – and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you!"*

You see by becoming children of God, the Corinthians were not just slaves. They're going to inherit all the good things that God has promised to give to his children. They will one day reign with Christ. They will help judge the world. They will access riches that are beyond imagination. They will eventually live in a place where the streets will be lined with gold.

That's what God's promises to give his chosen ones. That's our destiny as Christians. And the Corinthians are so taken by the riches of the gospel they have begun to think that they have already arrived. They have already made it. If they already have God's Holy Spirit, if they already have access to all of the spiritual gifts. If they already have been forgiven and now possess the righteousness of Jesus Christ then there is no need to live in the garbage tip any longer. Let's move right into the palace!

Slide 11

In the words of the theologian, they have an over realised eschatology. They think that everything that God has promised his people should be enjoyed right here, right now. Its heaven on earth. It's your best life now. A life of blessing not suffering. Riches not poverty. Healing not pain.

Slide 12

Now that was something that was valued at the time in Roman culture. And it is something that is still valued today. We don't want to live on the garbage dump any longer, a relationship with Christ should take me away from all of that. Lift me up out of the mire and the muck. Give me the life that I have always desired. And yes, one day that might be true. One day our old bodies will be made completely new. A new heaven and earth will be brought about out of the ashes of the old ones. And yes, we get a taste of some of those things now. But we don't get to eat the whole meal, not just yet.

Slide 13

And besides how did we get to the spot where we are now sons of God, sovereigns helping rule the world. Verse 6. *"Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, 'Do not go beyond what is written.' Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other."*

If Paul is applying his teaching to himself and Apollos for their own benefit then the Corinthians need to study what is happening to their fellow Christians. Paul isn't reigning at present, he is suffering. He is being slandered and scorned. And so, they should study the example of others and submit to the rule of Scripture. Don't go beyond what is written. God is not promising that once you become a Christian life is full of just joy and peace.

Slide 14

⁷"For who makes you different from anyone else? (Why are you a special case? Why would you get something from God that no one else seems to be getting?) What do you have that you did not receive? (Wait a second everything you currently have was given to you by grace. It wasn't because you earned it. Or because you are better than anyone else. It's due to God's grace) "And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?"

There is no need to boast, no need to be proud. Because everything good you have was given to you by a gracious God. So, you are no better than your neighbour. You haven't done anything more worthy than your non-Christian family member. For yes you are sons & daughters of God but you are still slaves of God. You are both a servant and a sovereign.

Slide 15

So how do we live such a double life? What should get the priority? Well in Philippians 2, Paul says ⁵*"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

⁶*who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;* ⁷*rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant,*

being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by

becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! ⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and

gave him the name that is above every name,”

You get it? Jesus was both servant and sovereign. And if we are going to be like him then we are to humble ourselves. We take to our pride with a big stick and serve others. And then let God lift us up. Let God look after the rewards. Let God work out all the rest of the stuff.

Slide 16

Pride can overtake us even as Christians. We can treat ourselves as the most important person of all but that is not what our master Jesus did. He showed us the way to fight our pride. He came down to the rubbish tip of this world and he lived among those you had made a complete hash of their lives. Jesus knows how to keep our feet on the ground. Jesus shows us how not to be too big for our boots. Yes, we are sovereigns & servants but Paul now wants to remind us that when we live out the Christian life it is also

Slide 17

3. A spectacle (verse 9-12)

⁹“For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings.”

You see when the Greeks were in power, the theatres were filled with plays and speeches. But when the Romans dislodged the Greeks as the top dogs in the region, people came to the theatre to watch men fight with men, women fight with women, even people fight with wild animals. This was hand to hand conduct. It was a fight for your life. And many of the people who fought this way to entertain the masses were soldiers who had been captured in one of the many wars that the Romans were fighting in.

Slide 18

These captured soldiers would be paraded through the streets and led to the colosseum to face death at the hand of a gladiator or a wild beast. And Paul is saying that he is not in the box seats watching the arena, he is the one who is in the arena fighting for his life. And the whole world is watching, actually the whole universe is watching, angels included. Watching how we are conducting ourselves.

Imagine that? The people around us are watching us. The world is watching us. The whole universe is watching us. And what do they see when they look at you and me?

Slide 19

¹⁰“We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honoured, we are dishonoured! ¹¹To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. ¹²We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; ¹³when we are slandered, we answer kindly.”

What do they see? They see us weak. They see how foolish we are. They see how vulnerable we are, how desperate we are, how hopeless we are. And yet they see the work we are trying to do. They see that we don't treat people the way they are treating us. They see in our words and actions grace, kindness and forgiveness.

During WW2 the Anglican Bishop of Singapore was imprisoned by the Japanese and was repeatedly beaten by his guards but each time he consciously forgave them. Years later the bishop baptised and confirmed one of his torturers, so moved had he been by the forgiveness shown to him.

Slide 20

Isn't that the example of Jesus? Reviled by the Romans. Persecuted by the Jews. Vilified by the Sanhedrin. Abused by the crowds. Abandoned by the disciples. And yet on his mouth were words of blessing. Were gentle words of hope. “Father forgive them they don't know what they do.”

And that's the example that Paul has given to the Corinthians Church to follow and for us to follow. Paul did not need to work with his own hands, he could have got others to support him. But he still is up every night making tents, using his skills with leather work, working with his hands so that he wouldn't be a burden to others.

Imagine that. Someone would pay your expenses so that you didn't have to work and you choose to work anyway to model the life of Christ. You could be a celebrity preacher, a rock star but you chose instead to be a blue-collar worker to serve the people around you. You could live a comfortable existence but for the sake of the gospel you choose to live on a garbage heap.

Slide 21

That's one way to deal with our pride isn't it? To put yourself in a situation where you are a spectacle for the whole world. Someone who will be laughed at, treated with scorn and derision, a fool. But Christ's fool. God's servant. Someone that relies upon Him and him alone. In the words of Warren Wiersbe "*Strength that knows itself as strength is weakness but weakness that knows itself as weakness is strength.*"

Slide 22

4. A servant, a sovereign, a spectacle and fourthly scum.

"*We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world – right up to this moment.*" Scum, garbage, rubbish. Wow that is going to help our church grow isn't it? Come to our Church and you will be treated like garbage. Like potatoes peels that are thrown out. Like the dregs of the coffee cup. Like leftovers on the BBQ plate, like the burnt remains on a frying pan.

Slide 23

But that's how the Christian will be treated like at times. And we are beginning to see that again in our society. We are not respected for what we do in our society any more, we are vilified. Because we dare to say things about how God's wants us to live, how we should control our sexual urges, how we need to point people to the one and only saviour Jesus. And that means we are dangerous. That means we are the scum of the earth. When I first began in the ministry it was a high calling now people think I am wasting my life.

And you are wasting your time coming to Church today. And you are stupid giving up your Friday night for the youth. And you are crazy to go up and talk to that person that no one else wants to talk to. And besides you should spend that money not on the Church and its ministry but on a decent holiday or a new car. Take don't give. Enjoy don't restrain. Be sovereigns not servants. Be sons not slaves.

You see the values this world has are just so different to the values that the word has. And sometimes even different to those you worship with have. Why serve others when you can get others to serve you? Why be treated as garbage when you can have honour and respect? Why make costly sacrifices when you can just walk by on the other side of the road and get to where you want to get in this life?

Slide 24

Why? Pauls wants us to understand that is only in true humility that we topple self from the throne. Self is ejected from the driver's seat of our own lives and instead, Jesus Christ is set up behind the wheel. He drives the engine of our lives by His Word. So, we are not to go beyond what is written.

A servant is no greater than his master. And our master Jesus became the scum of the earth to bring us the riches of his glory. Our big brother Paul went without food and clothing and was brutally treated so that the good news of Jesus might make it around the world. Our parents prayed for us, our Sunday school teachers sacrificed for us, our friends gave up their time for us, our forefathers built the Church for us so that we might realise that all that we have was given to us by grace.

And if we want to live the life of faith we need to deal severely with our pride. We need to find ways of serving others who maybe should be serving us. We need to have a willingness to suffer and to be made a

spectacle of, to be scorned and slandered, even to be treated like scum. Because that is how they treated our Saviour Jesus. And we want to follow Jesus.

Slide 25

And we don't want pride to get in the way of our response to Jesus. For in the words of John Stott we know "that pride is our greatest enemy and humility is our greatest friend".

Slide 26

In the words of commentator David Prior, "for people like the Corinthians who are concerned for their own status, reputation and popularity, authentic Christian ministry is immensely difficult to accept, let alone embrace." But for those who are followers of the Christ of Christian ministry then we hand over the driving of our lives to Jesus & he will drive us along the road of the best life possible. The life God has planned for us all along.

Slide 27

Missionary Jim Elliot once famously said, "He is no fool who gives us what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." And a few years later he gave up his life for the sake of the people that he went to minister to. But he didn't lose what God had in store for him. And so, like Elliot, like Heinz, like Paul, like Jesus we might seem to be foolish, even to some the scum of the earth but in God's eyes we are his sons and daughters and one day we will reign with him in heaven.

Slide 28

Our world wants us all to be upwardly mobile. The word wants us to be downwardly mobilised. Which way are we going to choose to go today? Which way are you heading? Looking down with pride at the people around us or looking up with humility and the God who has saved us and is in the process of changing us?

Song – Brother let me be your servant.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kf-Rkwz5skA>

Song – Servants of the Gospel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efUcfcEjmwE>

Benediction

¹⁴ *I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children.* ¹⁵ *Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.* ¹⁶ *Therefore I urge you to imitate me.*

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?