

Romans 12:1-8 and John 21:4-14
10.30am SMAS All-Age Service
(9.10.2011)

Last week we looked giving God our worship (talk on website). This week we're looking at giving our gifts and mostly looking at three main reasons why we should give our gifts in His service. Here's the first of today's readings to help us. Romans 12:1-8.

St Paul begins by saying that we should be offering up our lives as our worship to God. We are to be "living sacrifices" – this means 24/7. It doesn't start or stop in a service or building. He says this has lifestyle implications. Do not be shaped by the world: a world that says it's all about us because we're worth it. We are but that doesn't mean holding on to our lives but instead allowing God to change our minds so that we can know His will. Discipleship is not a second job or a hobby. Total dedication is required, not halfhearted commitment. This might sound like too big an ask but we're going to see that God actually equips us with what we need to use and give in His service.

The first reason Paul gives as to why we should we be offering up our lives as worship to God is in V1 'in view of God's mercy to us'. God sent His Son to earth to die in our place on the cross so we can know forgiveness and His resurrection power in our lives. Resurrection power – so we can know eternal life.

Let's look at what two people said about death before they died:

In Steve Jobs 2005 Stanford speech 'No-one wants to die' he said "No one wants to die, even people who want to go to heaven don't want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. And that is as it should be because death is very likely the single best invention of life's changes. It clears out the old to make way for the new."

Someone I admire but how sad to realize that for him this life was all there was. Death was the end.

Cassie Bernall as a young teenager had dabbled in the occult and witchcraft. Then she met Christ and dedicated her life to Him. She became active in her youth group and was reading her Bible in Columbine High-school library one day when two boys burst in. One asked if she believed in God, "Yes" she replied. He shot her dead. Cassie's brother found this poem she had written just two days before this:

*Now I have given up on everything else
I have found it to be the only way
To really know Christ and to experience
The mighty power that brought
Him back to life again, and to find
Out what it means to suffer and to
Die with him. So, whatever it takes
I will be one who lives in the fresh
Newness of life of those who are
Alive from the dead*

There's no value that can be put on knowing what Christ has done for us. If we don't know then we should be about the business of finding out before its too late. If we do know then we should want others to know too. God equips us to do this by making us different people with different functions as part of the body of Christ.

The body of Christ he means the CHURCH, not a building but a group of believers.

In one of the Peanuts cartoons, Lucy demands Linus changes the channel on the TV. She threatens him with her fist if he doesn't. "What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?" Linus asks. "These five fingers, individually they're nothing but when I curl them together into a single unit, they form a weapon terrible to behold." "Which channel do you want?" asks Linus. He looks at his fingers and says, "Why can't you guys get organized like that?"

Without condoning Lucy's method it gives a powerful illustration of how the Church, the Body of Christ, is designed to work together, "Individually they're nothing but when I curl them together into a single unit, they form a weapon terrible to behold." When we come together we become

an effective instrument for Christ and for opposing the works of the devil.

Paul compares the Church to the body. Something made up of very different parts that are all necessary for the whole to function. **All** parts need each other. Paul wants us to understand that each and every member of the Body of Christ, is different and essential to the whole. The Casting Crowns 'Who am I' video clip (shown during the service) cleverly demonstrates the body by using hands but it wasn't real! Eyes, hands, ears, nose are essential to the wholeness of the body. Each part must be present in order for it to be complete.

My speaking now is possible only when my brain, nerves, tongue, jaws, lips, larynx, lungs, diaphragm, heart, veins, arteries, capillaries and parts unknown to me all work together for that specific purpose. What appears on the surface to be the work of my mouth is actually a complex act of many parts of my body.

Without the cooperation of the various parts vital tasks would be impossible.

The same is true of the Church. We need each other. God places us amongst others with different gifts and abilities to complement and help each other present a wonderful whole.

God makes us unique with gifts and abilities in particular ways like no one else. Each special and necessary. Everyone has an important, essential, purpose and place to help the Church to function properly and work together as a whole.

We must carry out the function for which we were created and gifted by God. Some will be thinking you don't have any gifts and abilities that make you essential to the work of the church. That's not true! Some of you might be sitting there thinking you have a super abundance of gifts and the Church couldn't manage without you. That's not true either! Don't think of gifts and abilities as being clever things. Think of them as being the different ways God uses us.

What seems like a very unimportant part of our bodies is! I knew someone who had little toe removed and they kept falling over. One part needs another.

The Body of Christ needs all-sorts. To a newcomer the person who meets you at the door with a smile or offers you a drink is far more important than the person leading/speaking! That's what will be remembered. So our welcomers at this service need to represent all-sorts, bouncy people, shy people, young people, old people. And the ability to welcome properly, without being gushingly overbearing or miserably dull is a gift!

We're like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. If even one piece is missing, then the picture's not complete. We're all equally important to the Church. If one piece is missing, the picture's not complete. (Children presented everyone with a piece of jigsaw).

Look at your puzzle-piece closely. There's no complete picture on any one piece. It takes many to complete picture. Each piece maybe shaped similarly but is different. Like us similar with two eyes, ears, arms, legs, etc. But different in our personalities, finger prints, DNA. Alike but different, each individual piece helping to complete the picture, each individual person helping complete Christ's church!

Try connecting your puzzle-piece to you neighbour's. It probably won't fit properly. Does that mean that you're not important to the Big Picture? Or your neighbour's not important either? No! It means your pieces complement each other. Both needed to complete the picture.

The edges of each piece is different from any other. Like our different personalities, different ways of thinking. Your piece may not fit with your neighbour's piece, but it fits with 2-3 others pieces here! Just like us, we don't get along with all the people in the Church, but there are those we fit really well with! When we get with those people, our part of the picture is completed. And those people we don't get along with, they have others they do get along with. Their pieces match up, and they complete their portion of the picture.

It takes patience to complete a jigsaw. It takes patience to build up the Church, to find where everyone fits in. Where their talents and gifts best match the needs of the Church. Where Christ can use us to show His light and life to a dying world.

A vicar was writing a magazine article and when he finished he ran the spell-checker. It stopped

at the word "Jesus" with the comment, "Does not exist." This prompted another article reminding his readers "Jesus does not exist in anybody's vocabulary, including a spell-checker's, until you intentionally insert it."

Our lives should be devoted to pointing out the one who has done so much for us.

Here's another reason 'why' we give our gifts in His service: John 21:4-14.

As the disciples come ashore Jesus has already started cooking fish, but he tells them to bring some of what they've caught too.

The meal Jesus offers consists partly of what He himself provides and partly of what they'd caught under his direction and brought with them.

God could provide it all without our help but He wants to use what we bring.

This story has lots to tell us. Jesus wants to be with us, each one of us is special to Him. Even deserters like Peter. Recognizing Jesus is the first step. Sometimes, like Peter, we then realize He was there all along. But the important thing is that we must respond.

That breakfast is a visual-aid of the great banquet to be held in heaven. All Christ's faithful servants are invited and He himself will wait on them. When we accept His invitation we must use our gifts to show others His glory - and then we can leave the results to him!