

Sermon – 12th February, 2017

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Rowan Atkinson (c. 1984) said:

"We must have purpose. We mustn't be purpose-less. We must not exhibit purpose-lessness. We must be purpose-less-ness-less."

But what does it mean "to have purpose"? The dictionary definition of purpose is: 'the reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists'.

I think it is fair to say that, for a lot of us, our lives are completely full; our purpose is often defined by our jobs, families, school, hobbies, holidays, leisure pursuits. We are really busy people and there is little spare time. That certainly has been the case in my life. I work very long hours and sometimes have to travel abroad, I have family responsibilities, I am training, I have to study, complete assignments, prepare sermons ... and so the list goes on. It is by no means all drudgery but, as for many people, I live life to the full and I can certainly empathise with the busyness culture.

But is this really the purpose of our lives? Is this really the reason for which we exist?

The reading for today from Paul's letter to the Corinthians makes it clear that we are God's servants who are called to work together with a common purpose to allow God to grow in our lives, to be in loving relationships with God and with each other, and to draw others closer to God by following the example of Christ.

But how do we do this in our busy busy lives? Recognising this dilemma, we will be meeting on Friday evenings during Lent to explore whether we are "Too busy for God". Sign up at the back of Church today if this speaks to you – (advert over)!

Today's Gospel sets out Jesus' vision of the pattern of behaviour expected of His followers. It is a form of interplay between the vision of the kingdom of God and practical ways of living this out in the Christian community. It is a set of commands, a set of orders, a set of conditions to follow, to comply with as servants of God:

- To resist evil, anger and hostility
- To mend broken relationships
- To set aside structures of injustice
- To be right with ourselves, to be right with each other and to be right with God

Jesus is inviting us to question whether we are oriented to the God who calls us into His service. As His disciples, we are to be obedient to follow the command to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves and to live with each other in harmony. These are the

fundamental commands on which all else depends. And then, as a community of people reconciled to God and with each other, we can offer ourselves in loving service to be His servants here on earth.

And we do this by offering our gifts to God and letting Him show us how to use them in His service to fulfil His mission to reveal His love to the world and to all people. And we all have gifts and talents that can be used in so many ways – gifts of organisation, practical skills, musical talents, we may be good with our hands, we may be able to teach, to care for and nurture other people, we may be creative or have numerical skills.

We all have something we can offer, starting simply by offering ourselves, just as we are, and then letting God grow in us. And that opportunity exists today, here and now, through the prayers and proclamations we make in this service.

In the Eucharist we participate, not only in Christ's self offering, but we also offer ourselves to God through the ceremony, symbol and sacrament. When our gifts of money are placed on the altar, they represent the offering of ourselves. The words at the start of the Eucharistic prayer: "Lift up your hearts; We lift them to the Lord" are an invitation for us to lift our hearts and offer our very selves, our souls and our bodies to God—in whatever state they are in. If our hearts are happy, we lift them to the Lord. If our hearts are broken or heavy with grief, we lift them to the Lord. If our hearts are anxious or afraid, we lift them to the Lord. If we feel overburdened or too busy, we lift them to the Lord. We "come as we are" to God's altar and as we do so, we are transformed – transformed into people with a common purpose live out the Christian vocation, to live wholeheartedly and completely for Christ, open to how God will use us and the gifts and talents we offer, which are so freely given to us by God, and to share them with all people always committed to Growing, Giving and Serving.

Over the past two years, the growth that has taken place in the life of this Parish has come about as a result of the deepening, not only of faith, but also as a result of the deepening of relationships amongst the members of this congregation. In the second phase of our Mission Action Plan, we will be seeking to grow in depth and holiness; through faithfulness to the gospel, we will share our faith and seek to be a place where new disciples of all ages grow; and we will be encouraging people to find space in their busy lives for God.

We are defined by our relationship with God and He has given us this responsibility, this mission, this purpose. We are called to use this opportunity to work together in love and harmony. So let us be purposeful. Today, I invite you all to consider the gifts and talents you each have to bring to our Mission Action Plan as we all work together to play our part in building up God's kingdom here and now.

Amen.