

**St Nicholas Church
Sunday 23rd November 2014:
The Christian Faith 4 – Vow 4**

Vow 4 Service: We promise to give a fitting proportion of our time, talents, and money for the Church's work in the world.

Romans 12: v1 to 21 Life in God's service

V1: So then, my friends, because of God's great mercy to us I appeal to you: Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer.² Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God— what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect.

Paul presents us as priestly people, who in response to God, are told by Paul to offer our bodies in our service.

In other words, our service involves acts of physical work by our bodies –faith is **not** just about changing our hearts and minds.

Paul has stressed in the earlier chapters of Romans that salvation is a gift from God that no earthly act earns, because we all fall short of the glory of God.

Nevertheless we are expected to use our bodies in the service of God.

Just in the same way we are to think differently, once we accept God's gift of forgiveness and salvation.

So you see Paul is saying we have to be transformed, not just in the way we think, but also in the way we serve others in Christ's service.

Paul having spoken about the body in verses 1 and 2 explains in verses 3 to 8 the need for a renewed mind, which is capable of discerning God's will.

A renewed mind is a humble mind like Christ (V3).

Paul draws on the analogy of the body and the Christian community. Paul says that we are all **parts** of the same body but we all have different functions.

That means we are dependent on one another, and our Christian fellowship is enhanced by the diversity of gifts.

This metaphor of the human body, which Paul develops in different ways in different letters in the New Testament, enables him here to hold together the unity of the church.

Paul proceeds to give his readers a sample of seven gifts:

Speaking gifts of prophesying, teaching, encouraging, and service gifts of serving, contributing, leading, and showing mercy.

Just stop and think for a moment: what are the gifts that you have been given by God, and to what extent to you use them to build up our worldwide Christian

family..... And let's give thanks to God to the people here for their Christian service and their examples.

And the last part of Paul's reading today deals with our relationship to one another,

Agape love now dominates his writings.

So far in Romans all references of agape love have been to the love of God: God demonstrated his love for us by allowing Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. But Paul now focuses on agape as the essence of Christian discipleship.

Love must be sincere.....i.e. without hypocrisy.

The exhortation to love is immediately followed by the instruction to hate what is evil. (Verse 9).

Love is not a blind sentiment but it is discerning. Hate what is evil but love what is good we are told. The church must be a force for good, hence it must be able to discern between what to love and what to hate.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly and sisterly love we are told in verse 10 – in this way the church family will grow.

New people visiting a church need to feel a warm welcome and sense that love prevails throughout the church family..... Everyone is welcomed, everyone belongs, everyone is loved and respected.

Where Christian love is strong, among everyone, then the church family is welcoming and the church grows.

Work hard and do not be lazy. Serve the Lord with a heart full of devotion. says Paul in verse 11.

In UK, people run out of faith they say, they get worn down by life's troubles and failing health. But Paul says never lack enthusiasm..... and to maintain your enthusiasm we need our worship to be uplifting through our music and singing, and our worship needs to bring an inner peace through prayers and the understanding of scriptures.

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer. This is the way to maintain enthusiasm for Christ.

Verse 12 states the need for practical hospitality – the coffee after the service is an example of where hospitality brings people together and all are welcome..... even better, invite one another home for lunch..... Particularly visitors.....

And we are told by Paul on how to put love into action:

V14: Ask God to bless those who persecute you—yes, ask him to bless, not to curse.¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy, weep with those who weep.¹⁶ Have the same concern for everyone. Do not be proud, but accept humble duties.¹⁷ Do not think of yourselves as wise.

Good practical advice. Easy to say, hard to do..... And Paul continues in verse 17 with more practical advice.....

If someone has done you wrong, do not repay him with a wrong. Try to do what everyone considers to be good.¹⁸ Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody.¹⁹ Never take revenge, my friends, but instead let God's anger do it.

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And so we have 4 of the 5 Church of Scotland vows. But there is one missing..... And it is an instruction given by Jesus himself.....and that we will look at next week.

Amen.

It is called the Great Commission: Matthew 28: 16-20 Page

The eleven disciples went to the hill in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go.¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him, even though some of them doubted.¹⁸ Jesus drew near and said to them, I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth.¹⁹

Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.

And hence we have our 5th vow

Vow 5: Service:

**We promise, depending on the grace of God,
to profess publicly our loyalty to Jesus Christ,
to serve him in our daily work,
and to walk in his ways all the days of our lives.**

And there we have the 5 vows of the Christian Faith.... As summarised by the Church of Scotland.....

Put up slide with 5 vows:

And that is what we are invited to do..... to re-dedicate ourselves to the service of God if we have made such vows before..... or if we have not....or if we have not bought into all 5 vows - then open your hearts and minds to hear the word of God as it has been told to us today through scripture.

**Let's pause for a few moments in silence..... and rededicate ourselves to God or ask God perhaps for the first time to fill our hearts and minds with what God wishes us to do in his service.....
(1230 words) (2576)**

Amen

And now let us return our thanksgiving to God through our offerings. The offering will now be uplifted.

I went to a wedding of my niece in Cornwall just over a week ago..... it was a very happy wedding not least because the location and the weather was beautiful.....and it was a self help wedding where the catering and service was all provided by the families and friends who were also the wedding guests. The best part for me, was helping with the clearing up, loading the dishwasher of hundreds of glasses and plates and clearing up the venue the following morning.....the reason was I got to know the other family and many of the bridegroom's friends because we all messed in together to help with the chores on the wedding day / night.

But the catch was that after the late night of celebration people were very tired and few people were to be seen..... you see not everyone wanted to be up and out of bed by 10am after a night of celebration..... but we had to be because a large deposit of money was dependant upon everyone clearing from the premises by 10am, because another wedding party was due to arrive later than day.....

You see people had not really changed.....many people do not believe in being seen before midday after a very late night dancing the night away..... no matter how smart and attractive we had all looked as we had arrived at the wedding the day before..... we had not changed..... there was no motivating factor change..... We always stay in bed after a late night many said.....

And in our second reading, Romans Chapter 12, we find out what life is like in God's service. After God had fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures that a new covenant would be made through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, people were expected to change when living a life under God.

For example, this part of Romans gives us practical advice on how to conduct ourselves in God's service and our attitude to love, and how to counter evil.

Gracious Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, AMEN.

I thought that as you are going through the vacancy period following your minister Alan's departure in May and that you have had several locum minister in recent months, we might just spend some time today reminding ourselves what **practicing Christians actually believe about the Christian Faith.**