

'A Culture of Servanthood in Christ'

'57As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' 58 Jesus replied, 'Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' 59 He said to another man, 'Follow me.' But he replied, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' 60 Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' 61 Still another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.' 62 Jesus replied, 'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.' (Luke 9:57-62)

What is 'A Culture of Servanthood in Christ?' Simple question; potentially complicated answer. Here's what 'A Culture of Servanthood in Christ?' means: Any culture is called a culture because the culture sets the way of thinking and behaviour for the people who are part of that culture. So, if a person is part of a nation's culture, then that person will tend to think in a certain way, behave in a certain way and relate to other members in a mutually understood way that allows for good communication and a distinguishable style. You can often tell where they come from by the way the look and the way they speak.

For instance, what are the supposedly typical traits of these people? Which nation do they come from?

What is it that tells you that they come from there?

Slides:

The interesting thing about the Christian is that theirs is not a national identity, but an identity of the one they follow. They realise that they are not 'Lords' themselves, in the way that the Lord Jesus is Lord of all, but rather the Christian is a servant of the Lord. Having said that, they are not servants in the way that servants are often portrayed, doing the master's will because they have to and for little reward.

Rather, those who serve the Lord are the Lord's children and therefore part of a family. Their relationship is one of willing service, because, unlike the servant of the world who works for little pay, the servant of Jesus, through faith, serves to gain the inheritance that is theirs from the Lord's own hand. A gift freely given to those who believe and have faith in the Lord as the saviour of the world.

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You will see there are some passages where men react to Jesus's presence, words, or calling. Jesus saw in them hearts with good intentions, but in the end words with no action; or there is a distraction that stops them from being fully committed.

The reason I chose this passage was because v. 60 was the verse that gave me my commission to be a preacher of the gospel at my Bishop's Selection Conference in 2003. I have tried to put the proclamation of the kingdom of God into practice ever since.

Why do I point out all this? I want to ask what does 'A Culture of Servanthood in Christ?' mean to you? Is it saying: 'I will follow you wherever you go.', as a reaction, that ultimately will never even begin? Is it dodging the issue by responding to Jesus' call: 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' Or is it: 'Yes!' 'I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family'. In other words: 'Well OK, but not now, I have got too many things to do to be thinking about to follow you now, but maybe later'; showing a lack of commitment.

'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God' is the response of Jesus to concentrate on.

A church where there is not really 'A Culture of Servanthood in Christ' is one that begins to and then continually struggles with keeping the show on the road. Sincere in their belief they may be, and in their service too, but willing to share their faith with others outside their circle to grow the church? They tend to shy away from that. Similarly with tasks to be done.

The churches that are growing are the ones where people are not saying: 'I haven't got time', but ones where people say: 'I haven't got time to do that now, but I might have later; I will find out and give you an answer. Or, 'I haven't got much time but I do have some time, what can I do?' A bit of commitment goes a long way, especially if a lot of people are offering to do a bit. As the old saying goes: 'Many hands make light work'.

What would be really great is if we can get more people willing to be involved with helping to do things. I think that first of all, we need to see if the tasks that are carried out by relatively few members could be broken down into parts that other people could volunteer to do, thus less work on one person alone, but with more people joining in.

One really important aspect of church life is the Church Council. It is here that the church is run and takes its directions. To be frank, we could do with a greater percentage of the African and other non-European nationals to be members and have their say. One of the consequences of Great Britain leaving the EU is that there are fewer British residents living and working in this area now. What we do have is an increase in the African community in particular. So why not more of you serving on the council.

At our AGM on 26 April, there are posts to fill for the Church Council and the Archdeaconry Council. It doesn't have to be the same people that do everything else.

Our worship needs to reflect the same thing. Officially, all I am required to do is to preside at blessing the bread and wine at communion and occasional services, such

as baptisms, weddings and funerals. Some things like blessing the congregation in general can be done by those licensed to do so by the bishop, but everything else can be done by anybody, young or old. So how about taking a greater part in the service? If you feel you need help to do this, then ask and training can be provided. Often it is only a bit of confidence that is lacking and that can be helped along.

Then there are tasks that we don't seem to do officially at the moment, that would make a big difference to the team in general. The following come to mind, but the list is longer! Welcoming would be a great example.

It would be good to have welcomers at the doors and in the hall, so that people are made to feel at home in the church. Another would be people to set up the table for communion, take any linen that needs washing home and bringing it back when ready. Some people helping out in with the children's work; someone to help with the refreshments and in the kitchen; sweeping round after service to pick up the dust.

In a lot of English churches, it used to be the case that a person waited to be asked by the vicar to do something.

In a church that is growing, it is the people who take the initiative. Above all they take seriously the idea of a Culture of Invitation, because that is what the Lord Jesus commanded us to do in Matthew 28:

'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' (vv.19-20)

Bringing new people to worship and follow the Master is the greatest thing a person can do. What most of them need is an invitation.