

Hurst Green Methodist Church

8th Oct 2018

Eph ????

We all have a role in the body of Christ

In the years I was brought up there was a powerful movement demanding social justice for people. This has had a big impact in my life and I have always sought to champion the underdog and help people who lead disadvantaged lives.

This of course is tempered because people need to take advantage of the opportunities that are given them.

Some of you know my background and from primary school I was awarded the opportunity to go to Christ's Hospital in Horsham and have a first class education despite my mother bring up a single parent family on a council estate.

If you don't know about Christ's Hospital look it up – it is truly a school like no other.

But that desire for social justice encourages us as a family to support other children taking advantage of the opportunity of Christ's Hospital.

But I look back at the songs of my youth – isn't it amazing the way they stay with us over the years? I am sure you all have songs that come to mind from your teenage years.

Do you remember the song "The family of man" made famous by the Spinners?

There is a line I there that should challenge all Christians everywhere.

"There's not a man I would not call brother!"

That should be so true of all Christians

Do you remember the Great Commission?

Matthew 28:19-20 (ANIV)

¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

How about that as a challenge to us all – disciples of all nations!

Regardless of how they came here – regardless of their claim on our generosity – we are to make disciples of them all.

Are we fulfilling the commands our saviour gave us?

Probably not – I certainly do not feel I am meeting the call to social justice that my Saviour has put on me.

We need to constantly be asking ourselves – is there more we can do? Is there more we should be doing?

How can we make a difference in this place that Christ has put us?

For we are not here by accident – God has chosen us for this place and this time and has given us this role for today.

If we take that seriously we should be making a difference and yet I look around and wonder if I am making all the difference that I should be or am I cruising through life in a level of comfort but not administering justice in the way that I should?

For it is interesting looking at what God says about justice

Micah 6:8 (ANIV)

⁸ *He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

This is a constant theme in the bible – we are required to love mercy – that is easy since that is the route to our salvation.

Walking humbly with our God is harder because it requires us to remember that we do not deserve the salvation and righteousness that God in his mercy chooses to heap upon us.

But then we are required to act justly. This is not a command to set up a society that acts justly it is command that each one of us acts justly in all that we do.

That sounds difficult – how do I act justly? It would be easier if it was some big issue but I find I can only influence the small things.

And that is the thing about justice.

What the big issue sellers around Waitrose or on the streets of Oxted?

What of those who beg for change on our streets? How do we act justly with them?

For we each have our role in this – it is not something we can pass over to others.

Reading 1 Cor 12-26 One body Many Parts

There we go – if we do not fulfil our role our role may not be fulfilled!

The body is made up of many parts and you are one of those parts

Do you know that God has a master plan and he has made you ready for today?

And all he wants you to do today prepares you for tomorrow.

Ephesians 2:10 (ANIV)

¹⁰ *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Wow!!!

God has a master plan and we are part of it – he has prepared works for us to do – he knows in advance what they are and they all build up to be his body at work in the place where he has put us.

As our reading has just told us – each part has a role. A role today which may and probably is different to the role we had when we younger and is different to the role we will have in the future.

You probably know that I joined the Army from school and part of my motivation is that the Army is a powerful tool for social justice.

This is not often publicised but the intervention made in countries that need economic assistance and support for the underdog in times of absolute crisis are amazing.

I only wish the armed forces were used in this role more often where they overcome the politics of the Aid agencies and simply get on with putting aid onto the ground but I did not rise high enough in the rank structure to influence such decisions!

But we all still have a role to play – the body of Christ is still functioning in this place and you are part of that body!!

There is no opportunity to sit back and say your work is done – there is no God's waiting room. We have a role – we have good works – the only question is what they are.

In my time in the Army and since then I have been a staunch supporter of an organisation known as the Armed Forces Christian Union.

This is a prayer union set up way back in Victorian times to support our armed forces and Christians in the armed forces through prayer.

Currently we have 317 members connected for prayer and 2630 available to pray for them.

At Sandhurst I was introduced to the AFCU and realised the value of having people praying for you and so was allocated a group who prayed faithfully for us during our 20 years of service.

But the point I want to make is about us all having potential roles.

During one leave break we went to meet our group so that we could put faces to names beyond the two people who led the group during our entire service.

They asked us to go and see a couple who had been part of the prayer group for many years but had become old and frail.

They were a delightful couple and I still remember their front room and sharing tea with them but the most memorable statement they made was as we prepared to leave. They said they were housebound and so only had time to pray – all they wanted was for us to tell them what they should be praying for.

They saw no retirement in God's army – simply different roles as they moved on. They looked for the good works that God had laid before them – they sought them out and did them!

Do we?

God has laid out our good works – we need to see them and do them because each time we do them we gain skills and experience to do greater things for God.

Jesus makes an amazing statement in John 14

John 14:12 (ANIV)

¹² I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

We truly have trouble believing this statement – we will do greater things than Jesus because we have faith in him.

In the western Church we are amazed when we see healings and yet in Nazareth due to their lack of faith Jesus could not do any miracles apart from some healings.

I often wonder what we are missing out because of our lack of faith and lack of expectation that God will move in mighty ways.

But we need to be doing our part as the body of Christ – this is not a one man job; this is all of us working together and making a difference because we are the Body of Christ for this time and this place.

But what does that mean.

Well firstly we are all watchmen – we are here to give warning to the world – to those around us that God has put in touch with us that the end of the world is coming and there is only one way to heaven.

Thankfully God has made that way so simple that even the fishermen of Galilee could grasp it because it is freely given to all who choose to believe in our saviour.

And the great thing is that they are not convinced by erudite arguments or by great works they are convinced simply by faith.

None of us is called to convert the world but all of us are called to witness to the world

There is that lovely description of the new church in acts 2

Acts 2:44-47 (ANIV)

⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Would that our churches could say that daily the Lord added to their number those who were being saved!

But God is in charge of converting the sinner and our role is to make disciples of them once they are converted – thankfully we have the easier role!

But we need to be doing it.

Moses was 80 when he was called to his main role in life. Would we be ready to take on a major new role at 80 or would we sit back and say we are in God's waiting room?

Let me remind you that whatever your age you have role in the body of God that you need to be filling.

If you do not then the body is weakened and does not function as well – something is missing and it could be you!

So let me introduce you to a few secrets of scripture – remembering that all scripture is there for the teaching of us.

The first thing I want you to take home and continually remind yourself of is that you are righteous.

The evil one does not want you to believe this – he wants to remind you of your sin and try and keep you in your chains but that is not what God wants for you.

Romans 5:19 (ANIV)

¹⁹ *For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.*

Christ has chosen to make you righteous – I know we do not deserve it and I know we cannot earn it but Christ has chosen that we should be righteous.

That is an astounding statement but it is true none the less – Christ has made us righteous and so we can stand before God clothed not in our works that could never make us righteous by clothed in Christ’s mercy that allows us to be righteous before God.

And that leads us to something even more amazing from James – James is a book I hold dear in my struggle for social justice because of its balance between showing our faith through works rather than just showing our works

But James says you are righteous

James 5:16 (ANIV)

¹⁶ *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*

So God decides you are righteous and he also decides that your prayers are powerful and effective because he has made you righteous.

And then he lays before you good works to do.

Which brings me to our reading today – the armour of God. This is something we have been looking at in some detail because I felt that we touch on it and deal with it as something that is so well known we do not need to discuss it in detail.

Throughout the passage Paul emphasises that the aim of the armour is that we can stand – stand against the wiles of the devil – to stand firm.

And that we should

Ephesians 6:18 (NRSV)

¹⁸ *Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.*

And so you have the final thing we can all be doing and all should be doing like that housebound couple we can find people we can pray for – we are not short of that!!

But there is much more we can be doing. The Church in Acts was known for how it looked after one another and we have a command to make disciples of the world so there are many people we can look after.

Perhaps too many but in our area TVA can help you focus in – they are always after volunteers and have many exciting roles. Our local homes for the elderly can provide worthwhile opportunities for volunteering just to be with people and our schools use volunteers to read with the children.

There are endless opportunities to find and do good works; we just need to be prepared to do them!!