

Let me tell you about a busy day I had, one with a window of opportunity to complete my sermon for the following Sunday before packing for two days away with work, returning to guests who would be staying over, so a long list of tasks to get through, like cleaning, shopping, bed making. Prioritising God's work for my morning slot – getting my sermon polished and ready - I kept thinking about getting the bins in – something I don't normally think about –was I feeling on overload with my tasks for the day, needing distraction as I struggled to fine tune my theological thinking?.... I tried to ignore the nagging bins.

What was your busiest day in the last week? What were you doing that made it so busy? (*share*)

I imagine Zacchaeus was busy most days, busy raking in the taxes and creaming off a bit for his pocket.

We know he was at the top of his tree-a chief tax collector- and that his pickings were considerable, he was a wealthy man.

I imagine that those hearing Paul's letter being read out were also busy every day, busy with the tasks of running households and making sure businesses were successful.

Many if not most would have been household servants or slaves, absolutely key to keeping the economy of the Roman Empire buoyant with their day to day activity, but also with little control over their lives.

For many, their daily doing would have been repetitive, mundane, perhaps taking up a lot of time and effort for what seemed like little reward.

What was your busy day like by comparison?

Did it bring you joy or resentment, did you feel valued or simply exhausted at the end of it?

Did it feel to you as if what you did mattered?

Whether the answer to that question is yes or no, why was that the case?

Here's another question – does what you do, day in and day out, feel as if it has anything in common with what you are doing today, here, right now?

Listening to Paul's letter, what we are doing today, here, right now seems to fit with the words of verse 16

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another, through psalms and hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts”

There are -I hope- many times when we leave church on Sunday with an uplifting joy in our hearts and a sense of having praised and worshipped God with our all.

But what happens on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday....?

When we have spent the day answering the phone, rushing to fit in the supermarket shop, making sure the bills have been paid, working our socks off to get a job done, do we feel that same sense of uplifting connection with God?

Do we feel as if what we have done in our day has mattered to God even?

What Paul is urging in his letter is that we can and we should feel that way.

Twice in this passage from Paul's letter he has used the words "whatever you do" The first time he does so follows on from those words about worship-(verse 17)

"Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him"

I think none of us would dispute that thought when it comes to serving God in worship.

The second time is in verse 23, he says

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving"

How would that be, then, if whatever we did in our day today, not just on Sunday, but every day, we did it in the name of Jesus Christ?

What difference would it make? And how would we go about that?

I wonder how it was for Zacchaeus on that day. The day when he climbed to the top of a different tree and his life was turned upside down by Jesus.

The tease in the story is that it seems to be a pivotal turning point for Zacchaeus, he immediately starts to do things differently as a result of that meeting....but we'll never know how that worked out for him in the days that followed, his Mon, Tues, Weds...

Let's assume that Zacchaeus sustained an ability to do what he had to do as a tax collector through the window of serving Christ instead of serving himself.

We can imagine that this would have been quite challenging for him at first-people might have been suspicious, or mocked him.

But we can also imagine a more compassionate Zacchaeus;

a more generous Zacchaeus;

someone who tried his absolute best to be fair;

someone who people began to like rather than despise;

someone whom they would come to trust, to welcome as a friend; someone who would, in turn, encourage others to find that inner peace and uplifting joy that comes from knowing and serving God.

Now let's think about our own busy days, the ones we shared at the start.

Let's just take a moment to reflect on the extent to which we consciously approached what we did on that day with the thought in mind that we were serving Christ as we did it.

We might ask ourselves, if I had worked at it with all my heart, as working for the Lord, would I..... have behaved differently?

Would I have said more, or less?

Would I have spent more time and care on certain tasks?

Would I have prioritised my time differently?

What would the challenges have been?

What would I have gained?

We all do things, every day. Whether that's at home, at work, with friends, with family.

We do them as the people we are.

As people we have a range of identities - over time I have been Sue a daughter, sister, partner, mother, Nana, friend, shop assistant, nursing assistant, storyteller, social worker, teacher, dancer, the list could go on a long time, I am sure you get my gist.

The key point is, that when wearing these identities, I have also been Sue the disciple, Sue the Christian.

But would others have known that?

Last week, Barbara reminded us that God is with us wherever we are, at home, at work, at leisure, when we are out and about in our neighbourhood, the Drs surgery, the shops...

Wherever we are is our frontline

It is in all of these places that we do and say things alongside others, with others, for others.

Our challenge is to develop the habit of wearing our Christian identity first and foremost, over and above all others, reminding ourselves that we first serve God, because we do, we can also serve others, whatever the context.

We can all be ambassadors for Christ, act as his representative.

We can parent our children or be a friend in Jesus' name.

We can price a job or run a business in Jesus' name.

We can plumb in a sink, coach a team, bath a patient in Jesus' name.

We can enjoy encouraging others in our leisure time, in Jesus name.

In fact, there is no limit to what we can do in Jesus name.

Let me tell you about Richard and Mike.

Richard was leading a group at his church.

He decided to make a big assumption, so began the session with this question to the group.

“What are you good at in the Lord, at work?”

Awkward silence – undeterred he suggested everyone write on a post-it something they were good at in their day to day lives.

This is what Mike wrote:

“I am a policeman. I’m part of the armed protection team at Number 10. It’s a pretty macho group of people and over the years there has been some conflict. I have found that I am pretty good at bringing people back together.”

Not quite so awkward a pause, then other members of the group responded:

“You have a ministry of reconciliation.”

“you are a peacemaker”

“Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the sons and daughters of God”

Everyone in the group began to see that Mike was a man teaching people who don’t know Jesus how to forgive one another.

Mike began to realise that he was doing something at work in Jesus’ name, and he found not only joy but increased confidence as a result.

The reality is there is no limit to what we can do in Jesus name, because Jesus sets no limit on that.

The more we do, the more we will find ourselves able and blessed to do, in Jesus name.

Because what we do matters to God

What a rich reward that is.

On my busy day I eventually succumbed to that nagging thought about bringing in the bins, I thought that would stop me procrastinating on the important task of finishing my sermon.

As I got to the end of my drive, a neighbour walked by, looking really distressed. As it turned out, God’s important work for me that morning was not about getting my sermon finished, but about giving a listening ear at a time when it was needed.

Yes, even fetching the bins in matters to God.