

Today we re-visit a concept from a by-gone era. “Duty”.

*It's such an out-dated concept, that even on ANZAC Day, our nation tends to celebrate “mateship”, more than what it celebrates “duty” ... .. But duty it was, that called hundreds of thousands of Australians to enlist in WW I & WW II...*

*And today is the 18<sup>th</sup> August (anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan). And in Australia, the 18<sup>th</sup> August, every year, is set aside as Vietnam Veterans' Day.*

*So, let's not forget (today of all days), that it was a sense of “duty” that caused ordinary men to leave their ordinary lives behind, and to risk their lives, as they served (for you and I) in the armed forces.*

But I do wonder, in our nation, what the **future** of “duty” is.

- In our classrooms a student may earn a “student of the week award”, simply because this week he **didn't** throw a tantrum, or punch another student in the face.

But why an award, for something that should be one's duty?

- While on our tax returns, the Government may reward a person (give them a bonus) if they simply invest some of their own money for their own retirement.

Shouldn't that just be our “duty”; and

- And increasingly so, the Australia Day honours lists are filled with:
  - politicians who merely did what they were elected and paid to do;
  - Professionals who merely did what they were employed to do;
  - Business leaders, who were rewarded handsomely by their profits;
  - Sports people & pop-stars. But they've already been rewarded with
    - fame;
    - status;
    - sponsorships; and
    - riches

I wonder, for our nation, what the future of “duty” is, when we expect to be subsidized or rewarded, to do what is merely one’s duty.

Now, when it comes to the Christian church, some of us may have a very strong sense of “duty” (I’ll admit – I do), while others may equate “a sense of duty” with “legalism” or “trying to earn the approval of God”... And very often, those who have a **strong** sense of “duty” might get frustrated with those who don’t seem to have any.  
(And vice versa).

I’ve given today’s message the title: Servanthood, is where faith; duty; and Holy Spirit empowerment meet.

I’ll say that again:

Servanthood, is where faith; duty; and Holy Spirit empowerment meet.

Let's set the scene:

Jesus has just been giving some really hard teaching (He seems to do that).

He's been teaching about:

- Money and Possessions and;
- Caring for the poor; and
- Funding of the Gospel.
  
- Marriage and the permanency of Marriage;
  
- Righteous living; and
- the importance of repentance of sin; and
- Watching out for your Brother and Sister in Christ, and helping them to not sin; and.
  
- Reconciliation, and forgiving one's brother, over and over and over again.

And a lot of people will look at the teaching of Jesus (expectations / commandments), and some folk will:

- just throw their hands up in the air, and go, "Well that just cannot be done"; and give up.
  
- Others might 'dumb-it-down', and say "Well, that's just a picture of perfection" – something that might be nice to

aim for, but Jesus would never expect us to achieve it.”...

- Others may write it off altogether, and say, “Well, we live by grace.” – we must not **try** to do good – any good to be done, God will do Himself...

But each of those responses, diminishes of the teaching of Jesus... You see, there were a lot of times, where the Disciples misunderstood what Jesus was teaching, but this is not one of them. When the Disciples heard Jesus' teaching, one thing they knew for sure, is that to fulfill the commandments of Jesus, they would need Divine help (and a lot of it).

And so they said to Jesus, “Increase our faith”.... You see, something that they had already grasped, is that not only are we saved by faith, we are transformed/sanctified by faith – we take on Christ-likeness by faith. It doesn't just magically happen.

But Jesus' response, shows that it's **not** the amount of faith we have – it's about whether our faith is genuine”. **“If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.**

Now, I'm not sure why you would want to do that... Maybe you're sick of the purple bat-poo falling on your car. Transplanting a mulberry tree into the sea would probably fix that...

But you see, it doesn't depend on the **size** of one's faith – it is the power of God that matters. And when we **know** that something is God's will, by faith we **know** that God can do it... And we know that He can do it through us.

Now, when it comes to faith, when do we usually consider that we need an increase in faith?

It's when we want something really, really badly, isn't it... – It's when we're craving for our prayers to be answered, "Lord, increase my faith..." And maybe this reveals "What we most desire", as compared to what God most desires.

The Apostles are asking Jesus for an increase in faith, to help them to obey Jesus... (It wasn't so that their desires could be fulfilled.

It wasn't because they were praying for:

- a healing;
- a good season;
- a promotion; or
- to get help in making a major decision;

It was to help them to obey Jesus). And that is a very good reason to seek the Lord in prayer. ("Lord, help me to obey you.")

But, some folk get the bull by the tail here, and they promote a *Word Faith Movement* heresy: "*It's about the power of your words*"... *You speak blessings and not curses, and it's going to happen*... It's **not** about the power of words – it's about the power of God. **If** it is God's will, for that mulberry tree to be

trans-planted to the sea, then feel free to say, “Mulberry tree, be planted in the sea”. And it will be...

That does not mean that “my words have power” – it means that **God** has power. And if I command something to happen (because it is my will), that doesn’t mean that it’s going to happen.

So, let’s get this into context. How do we know that this is about praying for God’s will to be done? Jesus has been giving commandments about:

- giving generously;
- holding your marriage together;
- loving our neighbour;
- righteous living;
- forgiving my brother over and over and over again...

And the Disciples response is, “It’s all too hard – We need more faith”... No, you don’t need **more** faith – **just use the faith you have**.

This is about the Power of God, to help us, by His Holy Spirit:

- to **be** loving;
- to **be** forgiving;
- to **be** the reconciling people of God...

– to be the people that Jesus commands us to be...

And so:

You may have been hurt by a person. They may have hurt you so bad, that you feel you could never, ever forgive them. But by the Holy Spirit in you, “Yes, you can”. You see, this is where the rubber hits the road. — By faith, the people of God, are being transformed by the Spirit of God, to **be** the loving; forgiving; reconciling people of God, He commands us to be

Are you having trouble being reconciled with another? Hand it over to Jesus, and pray, “Lord, by Your Holy Spirit, give me a heart of reconciliation and forgiveness. I don’t want to just gloss over this; I don’t want to just tolerate this person – I want to love them like you love them.”

Are you having trouble with the love of money? Hand it over to Jesus. And pray, “Lord, by Your Holy Spirit, I want **You** to be my master – not my money”.

Are you having trouble in your marriage, and you feel “It’s over – I can’t do anything to fix this – I can’t do it anymore.”... The Spirit of God says, “It ain’t over. Hand it over to Jesus. And pray, “Lord, by Your Holy Spirit, give me a heart to love my Wife/Husband again. Help me to forgive them, and to love them like Jesus loves them.”

In faith, the Holy Spirit Power of God can transform you/me, to become the loving, forgiving, reconciling people He has saved us to be....

I’m pretty sure you already know: we don’t come to Jesus because we’ve got it all together. We come to Jesus because

we're all messed up, and He is the one who can straighten us out.

But you know as well as I do, that not everyone does get straightened out. And we've been hearing these really tough/demanding teachings of Jesus, and they're not just teachings – they're **commandments**... And so when it comes to the commandments of Jesus (being as tough as they are), what's the pass mark?

When it comes to the 10 commandments, is 5/10 a pass and 8/10 a distinction? When it comes to the teaching of Jesus, is it OK that I do this bit, but not that bit? And so, if I'm serving God in these ways, that lets me 'off the hook' in these areas?

- If I'm generous with my money, does that mean it's OK for me to hold this grudge against this other person?
- If I'm good at showing mercy to those who need help, does that mean "that's my thing", but when it comes to my Brothers and Sisters in Christ, well, I just don't get on with them??? Is it OK to not get on with them, because I am being merciful to others?

No, it's not OK... The fruit of the Spirit, is not different fruits, such that I can have some fruit and not others. The fruit of the Spirit is singular – one fruit. One fruit – many flavours. I cannot have "love", but not "patience". I cannot have "joy", but not "kindness"... Are you with me?



Let's bring this back to that out-dated concept of "duty".

When Jesus spoke about "duty", He was still on this same topic of generosity; righteousness; love; reconciliation. The Disciples knew they needed help, and so they asked for more faith. But the **amount** of faith isn't the issue. With **genuine** faith, the will of God **will be done** (in your life and in mine). BTW, are you beginning to understand that the will of God is more about becoming like Christ, than about aims and ambitions...

And so, with genuine faith, we can live Godly lives. So, what holds us back? A lack of Christian duty, is what holds us back.

Jesus gave the image of a slave.

So, if a slave has been working out in the paddock all day, at the end of the day, does the slave come home, undo his belt, put his feet up while his master serves him dinner? *Well, I personally, have never owned a slave, so I can't speak from experience*, but apparently not. Just because the slave has obediently served his master during the day, that does not mean, that come dinner time, his job is done, and so he **stops** serving his master.

Jesus said:

**<sup>8</sup> Will [the master] not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and [do up your belt – get yourself tidy], and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'?**

And then Jesus said:

**9 Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? 10 So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.' "**

It makes you wonder (doesn't it?), if there is ever a place for a "vote of thanks" in a church. We don't serve God for thanks, It is our duty.

The problem is, as Disciples of Jesus, we sometimes confuse "resting from our works" with "fulfilling our duty as servants of Christ".

You see, the starting point of salvation, is "We are not saved by doing good works". We are saved by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, and by faith in Him alone. But the life of those who **are** saved, now belongs to Jesus. And so, the life of a Disciple of Jesus, is far from being a life of inactivity.

As Disciples of Jesus, we are servants/slaves of Christ.

There **will** come a time for resting. Did you notice that in V8 Jesus said, "You will serve now" **and afterward you will eat and drink?**

There **is** a heavenly reward for those who serve Jesus. Be in no doubt....

At Christian funerals, we often hear the words of Matthew 25 quoted “Well done, good and faithful servant/slave”. You’ve been a faithful servant. **Enter into the joy of your master.** There will come a time for this heavenly reward, just not yet.

When we serve Jesus – If we manage to achieve **one** act of service, that doesn’t mean we relax in other areas of service.

*Imagine if an air traffic controller safely guided six aircraft through complex and crowded air-space, and so he goes “I’ve done my bit for a while. I’m just going to put my feet up for the next 20 minutes...” It would end in disaster. Why can he not do that? Because it is his duty to keep going.*

*Or for the husband to come home from work: “My work is done for the day. I’ve earned money to put bread on the table – my bit’s done.” And his wife wants to talk to him, but “No, it’s all my time now”... It is a husband’s duty, to talk to his wife. And it is a husband’s duty, to do jobs at home. His duty does not end, because the work-day finished.*

And so, if I’ve taught Sunday School this week, that doesn’t mean “I’ve done my bit of service – nothing more required until next week.” It’s not like once I’ve helped a little old lady across the road, so I’ve earned my Merit-Badge for the week...

The duty of a Disciple of Jesus, is to “live Christ”. Jesus did not come to **be served**, but to serve. And the duty of a Disciple of Jesus, is to serve (just as our Lord served).

Now, the thing is, serving Jesus, isn't merely a matter of ministry tasks. To serve Jesus, is to live Jesus.

It is our duty as Disciples of Jesus, to live out the Christ-likeness that He is developing within us.

Is the heavenly reward merely for those who have done stuff?

- Is the reward reserved for the likes of Billy Graham and other evangelists who have led millions of people to Christ?
- Is the heavenly reward only for the likes of William Wilberforce who campaigned for the abolition of slavery?
- Is the heavenly reward only for the likes of Hudson Taylor, who took Christianity to China?; or
- for the likes of John Newton or John Wesley who influenced not only their own generation, but generations to come, with their preaching and with their music???

Is the heavenly reward merely for those who have achieved amazing things???

No. The Heavenly reward, is for those who live Christ. It is for you, who dutifully follow Jesus, day by day; all day – every day:

- living in righteousness;
- repenting of sin;
- reconciling with those whom we are at odds with;
- forgiving those who have hurt us;
- being generous and merciful to others;  
**and yes,**
  
- doing stuff for Jesus.

I said before, Servanthood is where faith, duty and Holy Spirit empowerment meet. If I'm missing one of those 3 things, servanthood is going to be difficult; lacklustre; or impossible to do.

So:

If I'm not a Christian, that means I don't have the Holy Spirit. And anyone who tries to earn their way to salvation, will never be a servant of Jesus. And they'll never be Christ-like. Why? Because Christ is not in them. And so, to become a Christian, we repent of sin, and believe in Him.

If I don't have **faith** – if my faith is not genuine, it will all seem impossible. But genuine faith means “I know that my God, can do (and **will** do), everything that is His will”. And you and I, being transformed to become like His Son, is undoubtedly, God's will..

By His Holy Spirit, Jesus helps us to do the impossible:

- To love the unlovable;
- to forgive the unforgivable;
- to be merciful, to those who don't deserve it.
  
- And, to do the things that we naturally, cannot do.

That's the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, that's all very good and nice. And as Christians, we talk a lot about "faith" and "Holy Spirit empowerment"... Why do we lack the resolve to carry it through?

I suspect sometimes, there's that missing ingredient: We have become a generation where a sense of "duty" is no longer valued.

As Disciples of Jesus, we have a duty to serve; **and** we have a duty to live in Christ-likeness.

When it comes to "Christian duty", is there is no demarcation.

Do you know what "demarcation" is? It usually happens in a heavily union-controlled work-place. Where, "*I don't do that job, because that's somebody else's responsibility*". And so in a shearing shed, "A shearer can't pick up a fleece – that's the rouse-about's job.

For Disciples of Jesus, when it comes to Christ-like living, there is no demarcation.

Something I've noticed, is that within the Christian church, there are some who have a very strong sense of duty for doing stuff:

- for serving in mission;
- for serving in practical ways;
- for serving tirelessly in making a church "tick"...

but they're not good with

- relationships; or
- they're not good with being merciful; or
- they're not good with generosity; or
- they're not good with forgiveness...

But then there's those who **are** good with relationships, and who **are** good with forgiveness, and they **are** good with loving others... but when it comes to practical service, they do nothing...

As Disciples of Jesus, there is no demarcation, we serve Him always. We serve Him in practical ways, and in Christ-like development.

Servanthood is where faith, duty and Holy Spirit empowerment meet.

And my prayer, is that you and I, when we have done, all that we have been commanded, we will say, **'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'** "

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,

How humbling it is,

to know that You choose to do your amazing work through Your children.

Lord, we are unworthy servants.

We know this.

And the mere fact that if we believe that we are wonderful and worthy, we are probably filled with an ugly pride we need to repent of.

And so, it's with humble hearts,  
that we come to You today,  
in response to Your word.

Lord, some of us,

may not even be sure that we are genuine Christians.

And we want to fix that.

We confess our sin,

and we turn to You.

We believe in You, Jesus.

You loved us so much,

You died on the cross to save us from our sins.



And so, we repent of our sins, and ask for Your merciful forgiveness.

And Lord, we pray that You would fill us with Your Holy Spirit.

Change us; renew us;  
transform us to become more like You.  
And empower us, to do Your will.

Lord, instil into us,  
a sense of duty.  
That we would be able to serve You,  
And when we have done, all that we have been  
commanded,  
we will say,

**'We are unworthy servants;  
we have only done what was our duty.' "**

We Love You Lord,  
Help us to Live Christ,  
Every day,  
Amen.