

What should a church member be – Someone who Serves
Communion 28th Sept. '03 Mark 10:32-45

They say that most of us only manage to remember a little bit of what we hear - but that we remember a bit more of what we see - and that we remember things best when we both hear them and see them.

Well, this evening, we will both hear and see – so we ought to remember well! For in Communion we will see what we have heard in our reading from Mark's gospel.

We heard Jesus explaining to his disciples that *the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*, and shortly we will see the bread and the wine which speak powerfully of how he had to give his life as a ransom for many.

Maybe we need to be reminded pretty often - as clearly and effectively and powerfully as possible - so that we do not forget the foundations of our faith and hope, or allow them to become fudged or foggy. Perhaps this is why Jesus said, *Do this in remembrance of me* – make sure that you keep your faith focussed on what I had to do in death at a cross.

Jesus' first disciples certainly needed to have it explained to them more than once – they needed to be reminded again and again.

This chapter in Mark 10 was only one of the occasions on which Jesus tried to get them to understand where his life was leading and what would happen to him. Mark 10:32 tells us that Jesus had to take them aside, and tell them about what way things were going to go – it actually says that **again** *he took them aside* - this was not the first time, and it wasn't going to be the last time! And on most of those times it didn't really seem to sink in.

Just two chapters back at the end of ch.8 you'll find Jesus explaining to the same disciples that he would be rejected and handed over to be crucified, and on that occasion Mark tells us

that Peter actually spoke up and objected to Jesus' talk about having to give up his life.

And here in ch.10 he has to go over the same ground again: vs.33-34. *He will be betrayed ... they will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him, spit on him, flog him and kill him*

And if you read through the Gospels you'll find more times when Jesus had to do this, right up to the night when he shared in the Last Supper with them and tried to get them to understand and accept what was now very imminent, and what had to be.

Even after the Cross had happened, and the first news of Jesus' Resurrection had emerged, Luke tells the story of the two disciples who were walking on the road to Emmaus, still wondering about why things had worked out they way they had – they didn't recognise the risen Jesus when he joined them, and when he said to them: *How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?*

I wonder if we are a bit like them at times – easily and often forgetting the central significance and full importance of the death of Jesus – his body broken and his blood shed on a cross? We might not completely forget, but maybe we often aren't clear enough about why he had to do that for us – why Jesus' death must be at the very centre of all true faith.

Certainly the disciples in Mark 10 needed to get more focussed. Here was Jesus trying to get them to understand what lay ahead in Jerusalem for him, and there they were arguing about which of them would be able to sit at Jesus right and left hand in glory – James and John reckoning that they were the ones who should be there, and the others angrily indignant that they should reckon themselves more deserving than the rest.

And so it was that Jesus had to call them together and tell them yet again that 'they had got the wrong end of the stick' – that it

wasn't about what they deserved, but rather about *the Son of Man*, through whom God loved them so much and so beyond anything they deserved that he *came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many*.

I wonder are we ever like them? – We who sit to worship in his Church regularly and who come to sit at his Table this evening; we who like to count on the hope of Christ for our lives, who like to be counted among his followers, and who feel that we try to live life by his teaching and support his work in our church?

Do we need Jesus to gather us round him, as he did with those disciples in Mk.10, and remind us, as he did them, that it's not about who we are or what we have done for him, but rather about who he is and what he had to do for us – that he had to give his life as a ransom for us!

This word '*ransom*' is a very strong word, for very serious situations – it's a word for the situations which you cannot deal with by yourself – a situation where you cannot deliver yourself from a major problem – where you have to admit helpless defeat – where you are really unable to have any reasonable hope that the situation will ever change unless someone else comes in to change it – like a prisoner of war whose release depends on somebody else paying a ransom, or a slave whose only hope of freedom lies with someone from outside paying the freedom price on their behalf, or even a person who was guilty of a serious offence, whose life might be spared only through the payment of a ransom.

Do we really see that Jesus had to give his life as a ransom for us? Do we really see that faith and hope are ours because Jesus died? Do we really recognise a situation in which we are needing the costly forgiveness that only comes through the terrible death of Jesus – *redeemed with the precious blood of Christ*.

I think that we need to be reminded of this very often, for we forget very easily. We forget how critically important it was for us – that if Jesus had not done that for 'me', there would be no hope whatever – no hope of God for me, no real hope of a

heavenly Father who is there for me as I live through this life, no hope of God when it comes to the end, no hope of God for heaven – He had to give his life as a ransom for many in order to make this possible – and that many includes me.

The Disciples found it very hard to accept that Jesus would have to go to Jerusalem and face the Cross. Maybe our difficulty is a little different – we do see that the Cross was the climax of Jesus' life – we recognise the immense suffering and sacrifice that was involved – we see the astounding courage of Jesus in facing it, and we marvel at his readiness to think thoughts of concern for his mother and even of forgiveness for his persecutors. But whether we always see that *it was for us he hung and suffered there*, I don't know!

How easily I find myself thinking that I'm trying hard to follow Jesus, that I'm doing my best to live as I should for him – and I forget that there would be hope, no matter how hard I try, were it not for Jesus who gave his life as a ransom for me.

And so, tonight, I need Jesus to gather me around his Table, as he gathered his disciples round him many times, telling them again and again that he had to suffer many things, and finally give his life as a ransom – so that what I do not deserve and could not achieve for myself, may be achieved – and I may have hope of God in my life – forgiveness, faith, future – all through Christ. I'm glad that he said, Do this, in remembrance, for I need to be reminded, often.

I'm glad that we can hear what Jesus said about this, and that, in Communion, we can see what he had to do.

2. But wait a minute, this is not just about **remembering**, it is also about **responding**. Within Jesus' words in this passage about how even *the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give himself as a ransom for many*, is the very clear implication that people who trust in what he has done for them, must also be willing to become people who serve. In response to Peter and John who wanted the best seats in the kingdom, Jesus said,

Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

Trusting in Jesus who has given himself for us must lead us to give ourselves for others – not as an alternative way of having God’s hope in our lives, but as the essential way of showing that we are trusting in Jesus and his Cross of ransoming hope.

So this means that an essential part of responding in faith to Jesus, who gave his life as a ransom for us, is about cultivating the servant attitude of Jesus and practising the servant approach of Jesus. There must be Service in our lives, maybe even Sacrifice, of sorts – *servant, slave, drinking the cup I drink*, as Jesus said to James and John and the others.

As we take the bread and the wine which remind us of what Jesus has done for us – so all important what he has done – and as we profess our faith and hope in Jesus – then we must hear his call to us to be people who serve.

So there is a challenging message in this that we need to hear.

- We should not think of our Christian faith simply in terms of the reassurance and help and hope that it gives to our lives. Of course it is all of these things and much more, but it is also about the challenge of being servants and slaves for Christ’s sake.

- We should certainly not just think about our Church life in terms of what we expect to receive or how we expect to be treated, as James and John were doing – it is about what we can do in response to Christ who has loved us and ransomed us – our way of living for Jesus

Obviously this applies to all of life – those who trust in Jesus who came not to be served but to serve, cannot be people who are always thinking about themselves and always concentrating on what others should be doing for them. Maybe, indeed, in everyday life with our families, friends, neighbours and colleagues, this serving attitude of Jesus will be one of the most powerful ways in which the reality of our trust in Jesus comes across and hopefully commends itself to others.

And, within the life of our church, Jesus' words to the disciples, speaks powerfully to us. People who trust in the servant king of the Church, have to see that they must also be servant and serving people.

You will drink the cup I drink, said Jesus to those disciples – well maybe not the cup of the cross, for only he could give his life as a ransom of forgiveness and hope from God – but almost certainly, the cup of service and even of costly sacrifice at times.

In view of God's mercy ... offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – Paul's way of putting it in Rom.12:1. Service, and even sacrifice, is how we are to respond to the Christ who gave himself as a ransom for many.

And there are many, many Bible passages which tells us about the people of God responding in service, and making their wide variety of gifts available to him and for others.

It is no different today in his church – so many people giving back so much of their time and their talents and their resources as they seek to live with the servant mind of Christ - giving of themselves, with very little thought about what they get out of this for themselves – going far beyond what could be reasonably expected of them if this were a merely human organisation.

They are living out what they promised to do as Communicant people who trust in the Son of Man who gave himself as a ransom for them – the 4th New Communicant question – to which we are really all in duty bound.

And sometimes some of those people are having to give up too much of their time and talents and resources, because some of the rest of us ready to let them, and are not really thinking through what this call should mean for us. At times there are people of whom too much is asked, people whom we are too content to allow to do too much, people who become overburdened and even burnt out – because the servant load is not more fully shared out and carried.

Of course we all live with different circumstances in our lives – we have to understand those – we can't all be doing the same

things or giving the same amount of time or resources – but sometimes we allow our own personal pressures and constraints and responsibilities to become our get-out clause – whereas others are determined to do what they can and to do all they can, even with all their own many other constraints and responsibilities. As tonight, we again remember the Son of Man who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many, and as we celebrate the faith and the future that he has opened up for us, and as we are truly glad of the comfort and security that we feel through faith in Jesus, it is a good time for us to be thinking again about how we are doing by way of responding as servants of Christ and in service for the Gospel.

This is not a sermon to send us on a terrible guilt trip because we are not able to do what others are doing. This is a Gospel challenge to get us thinking about the ways in which we could be responding – what Jesus might have for us as our way of responding as a servant of the Servant King.

- the serious service of sustained prayer for the work of the gospel.
- the service of encouragement for those who are up there in the frontline work.
- the service of all sorts of practical tasks that release other people for other jobs.
- the service of behind the scenes work without which the more obvious work could not happen.
- the service of those who are willing to be the footsoldiers in the battle.
- the service of carrying responsibility and giving leadership that makes real demands upon us.

Oh, we could make such a long list of ways in which we can and should be servants for Jesus – ways that show that we are glad that Christ came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many – that we are willing to respond by being servants ourselves. This is not the time to do get bogged down in

the details of the servant jobs – but it is the time to recognise the basic point, and to think about it in our own circumstances.

And when we just wish that Christian faith and hope could be a more comfortable, more passive business – something that didn't demand too much of us, then keep coming back to remind ourselves that it wasn't like that for Jesus. He could well have chosen a quieter, more comfortable option – keeping away from Jerusalem, keeping his head down, indeed keeping out of this messy world altogether – but he chose to become flesh, to live as a servant, to travel to Jerusalem, to face all that he knew lay ahead for him. All his life on earth he chose not to be served but to serve, and then, at the end, it was his willing choice to give his life as a ransom for many.

Because he did that, we are able to have a faith that is for real and a hope that is for sure.

This is his Table – the Table of the Servant King – the Table of the Servant who gave his life as a ransom – the Table of the Servant who was raised on the third day.

We come to sit at his Table – to share in the tokens of his passion – to think again about what they mean for us in terms of God's full forgiveness and future hope for our lives.

But as we do so, we must also find ourselves listening to his words about responding, seeking to have the mind of Christ and to be servants for Christ, with our whole lives, and within the whole life of his church and its work and mission in the world.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Those simple words '*For even*' surely mean that if this was his way, then it must certainly be the way of those who trust in him and profess to follow Jesus.

As this leaflet, *What should a church member be?* says, they should be ***Someone who serves!***