

Sunday 6th November 2016

Do Your Thing!

Introduction

This year's Children in Need slogan:

Whatever you're into, do your thing and make a huge difference!

- People can often be intimidated by the idea of 'having a vision' but, as Christians, we are all called to do what God wants us to do.
- If we find out what that thing is, then we have our vision.

Start with what you've got

- In **John 6:1-14** we read the story about Jesus feeding the five thousand. [Summarise / read story]
- God always gives us something to start with, but we have to look for it, recognise it and then put it back into God's hands.
- The miracle of multiplication happened when a boy took what he had and made it available to Jesus.
- Andrew said to Jesus, *"There's a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?" (v.9)*
- That wasn't the end of the story – it was the beginning of a miracle as *"Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward He did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted." (v.11)* - and there were twelve baskets of leftovers! But all they started with was five loaves and two fish!
- What have you got? It may be small; you may feel it's insignificant – but put it into God's hands and it will multiply.

Zechariah 4:10

"Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin."

- We shouldn't be afraid to take small steps, or feel inadequate because they feel so small and insignificant, just make sure they're steps of faith and God will work through us.

Accept you're not good enough

- None of us are good enough! We never will be this side of eternity. The disciples weren't good enough either – they were a flawed bunch, just like us.
- Jesus said to Peter, *"...upon this rock I will build my church..."* **Matthew 16:18**
- But Peter then went on to deny that he knew Jesus THREE TIMES!! Jesus knew he was going to do this (**Matthew 26: 31-35**), yet He still said that Peter was *the rock* upon which the church would be built.
- In fact, all His disciples deserted Him when He was arrested (**Matthew 26:56**) – they all abandoned Jesus when He needed them most. Yet when He rose from the dead and met with them, He didn't once chastise them – He didn't even mention what they'd done. Instead, *"He showed them the wounds in His hands and His side"* (**John 20:20**) to let them know how much He loved and accepted them, in spite of their failure – and He does the same with us today.

- Every time we mess up, every time we disobey Him, or chicken out of doing something we know He's asked us to do, He says, "I love you. I accept you. I died for you."
- There's a common misconception that we have to, firstly, work at becoming holy and free from sin, then, when we're holy enough, we can actually serve God. But we all live under grace – Jesus died to forgive all our sins. Our serving God is not an afterthought to grace, it's a way of conditioning our hearts to receive more grace; putting ourselves into the service of God is part of breaking the power of cancelled sin. Serving God is something we do to *get* holy, not something to put off until we are holy.
- Going back to **John 20**, Jesus says to us the same words that He said to His disciples in immediately after showing them His wounds: "*Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.*" (**v. 21**)
- He loved and accepted the disciples. He loves us. He gave His disciples peace. He gives us peace. He *sent* the disciples. He's sending *us*. Don't wait until you're good enough – God is good enough, we don't have to be.

Know you're qualified by God

- Let's consider another Bible character who was sent to do God's work: Moses.
- You may be thinking, ooh, Moses, I couldn't be anything like him – he led a whole nation of people, he received the Ten Commandments, he saw God face to face – eek!!
- He didn't start there, though – by the time God revealed Himself to Moses (**Exodus 3**) in a burning bush and commissioned him – gave him his vision - he'd survived the slaying of all Hebrew boys, floated away on the Nile to be brought up, not by his own mother, but by Pharaoh's daughter and, as an adult, had killed an Egyptian for beating up one of his fellow Hebrews and legged it to Midian! Maybe not the most qualified person to be chosen as the founding leader of Israel...!
- His single qualification was that he was sent by God – and this was exactly what Moses was told to tell the Israelites when he went to lead them out of Egypt: **Exodus 3:14** "*I AM has sent me to you.*"
- That is the only qualification we need – that God has sent us.
- If God sends us to do His work, that is all we need. No other qualification will suffice, and no others are needed.
- We also need to recognise that God works in our weaknesses, revealing His strength. I've been in loads of situations where God's asked me to do something and I've felt completely inadequate, but when I've stepped out He's come through and together we've achieved things I never dreamt I'd be capable of.
Psalm 103:14 "*For He knows how weak we are; He remembers we are only dust.*"
Romans 8:26 "*And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness.*"
2 Corinthians 12:9 "*My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.*"
- Feeling weak? Inadequate? Ill-equipped? Great! Bring on God's power!!

Go where you're sent

- Being sent by God means that He is with us – and we can't do what He's asked us to do without that. We need the intimacy of a relationship with God in order to go with His power, presence and purpose. Without that, our best laid plans, our greatest qualifications will not fulfil His purposes – and we won't fulfil our vision. We need His presence and His power to fuel our ministry.
- Moses was less than willing when God called him to rescue the nation of Israel from the Egyptians! He put up quite a few arguments as to why he shouldn't go:

Exodus 3:11 *“But Moses protested to God, ‘Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?’”*

Exodus 3:13 *“But Moses protested, ‘If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ they will ask me, ‘What is his name?’. Then what shall I tell them?’”*

Despite lengthy assurances by God that the elders of Israel would accept his message – even giving him the exact words to say – and that they would even leave with gifts - Moses continued to raise objections:

Exodus 4:1 *“But Moses protested again, ‘What if they won’t believe me or listen to me? What if they say, ‘The Lord never appeared to you?’”*

God then gave him two miracles to perform, just to reassure Moses, yet:

Exodus 4:10 *“But Moses pleaded with the Lord, ‘O Lord, I’m not very good with words. I never have been, and I’m not now, even though You have spoken to me. I get tongue-tied, and my words get tangled.”*

Exodus 4:13 *“But Moses again pleaded, ‘Lord, please! Send anyone else.’”*

Eventually, Moses agreed to go with Aaron as his spokesperson – but not before He got angry with Moses (**Exodus 4:14** *“Then the Lord became angry with Moses...”*).

- Telling the all-knowing God that He doesn’t have all the information to hand is usually a bad idea! But Moses still felt the need to remind God that he wasn’t very eloquent, nor qualified to carry out the mission God had for him.
- Moses’ problem was that he didn’t understand his own identity, so God had to rearrange Moses’ perception of himself – and of God. We’ve talked a lot about this recently, and Julia is going to give us a quick reminder this afternoon, but I want to make one point about it now:
- Our identity is not made up of the ideas we have formed over the years we’ve been alive – it’s made up of whatever God says about us. When God says we are His children, then we are, whether we feel like it or not. When He says we are precious to Him, we are, whether we feel like it or not. Equally, when God calls us to a task, that task will be perfectly suited to us, whether we feel like it fits our gifts or not.
- Whatever God says about us is true. Whatever He calls us to do is right. It’s our perception that needs to change, not God’s will.
- Whilst God sends us, He comes with us as well. The disciples received clear instructions regarding being sent out:
Acts 1:4-5, 8 *“Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift He promised, as I told you before. John baptised with water, but in just a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit...You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere – in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*
- We, too, have the Holy Spirit journeying with us – we’re not sent out alone. But we do need to go where we’re sent!!

Earning our place?

- We know that we don't need to do 'works' to earn our place in heaven:
John 5:24 *"I tell you the truth, those who listen to My message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life."*
- If you know and love the Lord Jesus, your place in heaven is assured. You have a reserved seat! We don't have to do things for Him in order to keep that place.
- HOWEVER, whilst salvation comes by hearing and believing, faith always results in works.
- Works don't secure our Kingdom citizenship, they simply reflect the fact that we have become Kingdom citizens.
- We don't earn salvation, but we should demonstrate it. Jesus expects us to do the works of the Kingdom – He made that very clear in the Great Commission:
Matthew 28:18-20 *"Jesus came and told His disciples, 'I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'"*
- Works of the Kingdom are evidence that the King is at work in us. They authenticate the faith that we say we have. It's not about living up to a standard, but about living a lifestyle of serving Him.

He has a plan!

Jeremiah 29:11-13 *"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for Me wholeheartedly, you will find Me."*

- If God knows the plans He has for us, that must mean He HAS a plan for us – each one of us. We are ALL called with a purpose.
- If we pray and seek Him wholeheartedly, He will show us what that plan is – and that becomes our vision, because a vision is simply God's plan of what He wants us to do.
- The word 'vision' often conjures up images of great spiritual exploits: overseas missions saving as yet undiscovered tribes of people...or 'up-front' roles in the church, standing on a platform preaching, prophesying, leading worship or healing the sick – or all four at once!! But not everyone is called to travel the world preaching salvation, or to stand up on a Sunday morning in front of a congregation. If you think about the number of people in churches, and the percentage of those people who carry out those roles – there must be other things that God calls people to do.
- Not all visions relate to 'spiritual' matters. We tend to compartmentalise our lives, to view God as only having influence and interest in 'spiritual' visions, missions and goals. Yet He's interested in the people we connect with – friends and family outside of church; our hobbies and interests; where we work or socialise.
- Vision does not just refer to church ministry, but also what we do outside of a Sunday morning. Maybe God has a plan for your love of baking, gardening, cycling, rock climbing...maybe there's a reason why you love doing what you love doing...why you're connected with certain people...maybe God has a purpose behind it.

A lifetime of preparation

- Many of the things you enjoy doing, you may have done for a lifetime, not even realising God's intention behind them.
- I've always loved singing, I can remember singing in the back of the car whenever we went on journeys, singing with my Dad at home (recording ourselves!) – I didn't know God was preparing me to lead worship – I didn't even know there was any such thing as a worship leader!
- I always wanted to be a teacher – from very small. I qualified in society's terms in 1993, getting the required academic qualifications to allow me to teach in schools. Even then, I had a feeling that I wouldn't always be in the classroom, that this was a step on the journey, but I didn't know where that journey would lead. In fact, in my first year of teaching I vowed never to work with children with learning difficulties – I had a class full of struggling 6 year olds – and I was struggling, too!! After 17 years of teaching, in 2010 I found myself self-employed as a specialist dyslexia teacher, working with children and adults with learning difficulties. Six years on, I'm still doing it, still loving it – and this is as much part of my vision and calling from God as leading worship on a Sunday morning – it's not 'church' but it is part of God's plan for my life – my vision.
- What things do you do that you don't even think about? What gives you a buzz? What makes you feel fulfilled? I'm a firm believer that, whilst God may take us out of our comfort zone at times, vision and purpose should be fun, enjoyable – it's a paradox of working within our giftings and strengths, whilst being called to rely totally on Him.
- Our vision may change and develop over time, too. Starting small and gradually increasing.
- We may also be called to a completely new area. While we were on sabbatical, Jonathan and I received quite a number of prophetic words, one of which was calling us to 'Open the gates' to usher in God's presence. We were a bit confused about this, thinking that we already open the gates to God's presence whenever we lead worship – maybe God was calling us to lead worship in a different way or in a new context? We'd made the mistake of assuming that worship is our only calling, therefore the word must be about worship. In fact, we feel that the word is about discipleship and mentoring – a new way, for us, of 'opening the gate' alongside our worship ministry.
- What are you doing now that God wants to be a part of?

What's stopping you?

- *Not good enough?* None of us are – God's grace is enough for all of us. We become more like Jesus by serving Him.
- *Too young? Too old?* **Joshua 24: 15** "As for me and my family we will serve the Lord." – no age restriction!
- *Too busy?* God may want you to serve Him in what you're already doing – or to re-prioritise how you're spending your time.
- *Not 'spiritual' enough?* Do you love Jesus? That's as 'spiritual' as it needs to get.
- *Not an 'up-front' person?* You don't have to be – God will call you to something uniquely designed for you. Don't compare yourself with others – everyone's calling and vision is unique.
- *Not ready?* Just take one step at a time – if you wait until you're 'ready' you'll never do anything.

Whatever you're into, do your thing and make a huge difference!

Ephesians 4:1 "Therefore, I beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God."