

May we be equally unreserved as we commit our lives in the service of the God who has shown us such love.

Amen!! Thanks be to God!!

Prayer:

Eternal God, in Jesus you came among humankind at a particular time in history, yet you were subject to much the same pressures and demands that we experience today.

In the life of Christ you showed us how we could spend our talents both wisely and extravagantly by investing them in our relationship with you, our neighbour and community.

Help us to spend our lives in loving service and prayerful reflection on your word, and so enter into an endless season of abundant joy in your presence. In Jesus' name we pray this. Amen.

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A Message from Mark!

Celebrating Talents

14 March 2010 - Lent 4

Scripture ~ Luke 15:1-3; 11b-32

On this fourth Sunday of Lent, when we've heard again the wonderful story of 'The Prodigal Son' we come to these questions:

What kind of an enigmatic parent God is this? One who gives us dangerous freedoms? Who permits us the freedom to wreck our lives rather than be forced into moral living? Who entrusts us with possessions we might not be capable of handling wisely? Who when all is selfishly squandered, runs to meet the sinner? Who welcomes the waster to a party table? Who stands in the darkness with good people who cannot cope with free grace being lavished on the unworthy? Who is this unexpected, prodigal, undignified parent figure? And what is our response to such prodigal love?

I suggest that if we look carefully, we may discover that there is within our character bits of both the younger and older brothers. In us there may be a tension between the two; almost a sibling rivalry.

Both sides of our nature must deal with a God who does the unexpected and extravagant thing. A God who supersedes all our ideas of justice and shakes our self-righteousness. A Divine lover who runs and leaps for joy when an apparently worthless sinner comes 'home'. A Holy God, who still stands in the darkness with a very respectable but recalcitrant, sinner.

Friends, the God we know and worship and serve has shown us in Jesus how important it is to offer up our whole lives in response to all that we are coming to experience. The Apostle Paul writes with clear instructions to the early Christians in Rome (Romans 12:1):

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Some of us are reluctant. Some of us play a humility game and don't feel that we've got that much to offer. Let me say to each one of you, that God doesn't make junk and this church is able to accomplish so much for God because a growing number of us are coming to truly believe that!

Just like baby Tara, this morning's latest addition to be welcomed into God's family, you and I are made in the image of God. We are all unique and special and individual. There is no one with your name who is exactly like you in all the world. Who you are and what you have (by way of talents and giftedness) and what you will become because of the grace of God working in you is part of the miracle of our being on a pilgrimage with God!

In our Epistle reading for today, Paul says: ***“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! This is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation”.***

You and I find ourselves caught up in the mighty cause of reconciliation in our church and world! A cause that is bigger than us - bigger than just our own small world of private concerns - bigger than just the agenda of our families or our friends - we are caught up with a God who supersedes all our ideas of justice and shakes our self righteousness. A Divine lover who runs and leaps for joy when an apparently worthless sinner comes home. A Holy God, who stands in the darkness with a very respectable but recalcitrant, sinner.

In these next minutes, lets try something together: Will you please stand up when what I say relates to you and your giftedness and your willingness to share your talents for God within the church and the world:

You sometimes: lead worship here or somewhere else; lead prayers in church; participate in our tele-link prayer and care network; sing in the choral group; collect or count or bank the offering; welcome people to church; talk with a stranger; play a musical instrument in worship; dance; clean this building; help at a working bee; serve on a committee; help at the sound desk; work in the church kitchen; serve in the Op Shop; cut the grass or attend the gardens; share positive stories of our church; speak of your faith with others; arrange the flowers; assist with communion; contribute to our website; write for the 'Logos' magazine or help distribute it; visit members and care on behalf of your church; phone a friend in need; take on a job to help enhance our ministry; drive someone to or home from church; act in a drama; teach or lead our younger members; mentor someone in their faith journey; donate goodies for a special stall; participate in a covenant group or encourage someone with a warm smile?

Have a look around?? Nearly everyone is standing!! How wonderful!! We're not bragging about what we do. We're simply celebrating what God encourages and enables in this community as our talents and giftedness are put at God's disposal.

(Please sit.) Of course, if I went on to name the extensive list of community service activities I know about from listening to your other passions, then we'd be here for ages. Clearly, we're blessed by an amazing variety of complementary talent and ability in this community of faith. We give thanks to God for all that we have and are and will yet become.

The stewardship of our lives is our loving response to a generous extravagant loving God who sets no limits.