

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5-12
SERVANTS FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS

Church is meant to be different! We live in a world where people are often selfish; where leaders are seen as powerful people who are in these places to satisfy their own ego; where it matters to be strong and people who are weak are cast aside. Church is meant to be different! We are meant to live by different values and to walk in different ways; so often we do that, but it is always good to be reminded. The Church in Corinth was no different: they needed reminding of what was important, that the gospel of Jesus was their treasure, something of great value, and not to be taken lightly. They had an uneasy relationship with the apostle: some didn't rate him, he was "unimpressive" they said; he was "not a real apostle, but a bit of an imposter" said others. He reminds them of what makes church different; church is different because Jesus is different.

"We do..." (2 Corinthians 4:5) There are two things for us to see here, both of which lead us into our celebration of communion. First, *"We preach..."* (2 Corinthians 4:5) The centre of the Christian message is not about me, it is not about the church and how good for the community having the church is; the centre of the message is Jesus; Jesus is Lord. That was Paul's message; it was never about him. There were times when he wrote about himself in his letters, but you always get the feeling that he is slightly uneasy, even embarrassed by doing that. The gospel is always and only about Jesus; Jesus is Lord. The *"all-surpassing..."* (2 Corinthians 4:7) and this is what Paul wants the Corinthian Christians to remember. It is Jesus who saves; it is God who gives us strength. When *"we are..."* (2 Corinthians 4:8) it is not our own resources of strength, but it is the all-surpassing power of God that sustains us, the grace of God that gives us strength to be resilient and so we are not crushed, or in despair, or abandoned or destroyed.

Who is the centre of the communion service? It is not me, though I have the centre seat behind the table; it is not the elders; but Jesus is the centre. It is all about Him. The bread and wine are reminders to us that Jesus is Lord. Our faith in Jesus is made stronger by our being here because we are reminded that He died for us, that He gave His life, that He sacrificed Himself on the cross for us, that we might be forgiven, that we might find eternal life, that we might be brought to God. Jesus is Lord.

Secondly, *"Ourselves as..."* (2 Corinthians 4:5) The leader of the church describes himself as a servant for the sake of others. Christians who serve God, who serve one another, who serve others - is that how we see ourselves? A few years ago we changed the communion service: it used to be that the minister and elders shared the bread and wine first and then we served you; we changed that to serve you first and then the elders and the minister last. Why? To reflect something of this notion of service: we are here to serve and to reflect that, we go last! We need to take that spirit of service with us out into the world we inhabit. Tomorrow we have a music concert here to celebrate the musical talents of the children and young people in this area; the proceeds of the concert are for a children's diabetes charity. The church will gain nothing financially from this; we might not gain anything from it at all but it seems good to me to give the children and young people a place where the community can celebrate their talents; I'm happy to serve their interests and that of community. We are servants for sake of others!

We serve others because that's what Jesus did. *"For even..."* (Mark 10:45) Jesus came as a servant for sake of others. He washed His friends' feet – the act of a servant; He gave His life on a cross – the act of a servant. Paul, the servant of the church, even in Corinth, giving himself for the sake of others, for the sake of the Christians in Corinth who are struggling with life and faith, who feel hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down; he is happy to serve them and bring them grace from God to overcome what they find hard. The bread and wine of communion are not symbols of power and glory, but are signs of service from Jesus, of sacrifice, of a broken life given for us. We celebrate the fact that the servant who humbled

Himself is raised from the dead and is full of glory and power; but remember, the One full of glory and power once wore a crown of thorns.

What will we take away from communion – that it is all about Jesus? That Jesus is Lord? Do we tell others that Jesus is Lord? Are we servants for the sake of others? Is that how we think? Is that the kind of church we want to be, that serves the people around us? That is our calling! Jesus – the servant for the sake of others; Paul – the servant for the sake of others! Us – are we servants for the sake of others?