

**A series of sermons based on  
“God at Work -Living Every  
Day with Purpose” by Ken  
Costa**

*Talks 1-9*

## Work Matters – Introduction & 1. God and Work

### *Family Service & Parish Eucharist 10.1.16 delivered by Richard Bubbers*

As you've heard, we are using as a resource the book by Ken Costa, "God at work". Ken Costa has had over 40 years' experience in the Financial Sector and, after starting life in South Africa, has spent most of that time in the city of London. After serving as vice-chairman of UBS Investment Bank he became chairman of Lazard International. He is a very active Christian layman and is involved on a voluntary basis with, amongst other things, Great Ormond Street Hospital, the London Symphony Orchestra, and the Nelson Mandela children's fund.

**Work** seems to get everywhere: a lot of people spend a lot of their lives doing it. You can have too much of it – you can have too little of it.

Someone once likened our lives to a house: we can let God into the house of our lives, but there is the risk that we can allow him into the hall or into some of the other rooms, but not into **all** of the rooms of the house. God is interested in all of our lives – and most particularly he's interested in how we spend our time at work.

You are probably aware that as well as being here at St. Laurence's I spend half of my time as a workplace chaplain in the area with Faith at Work in Worcestershire. A big aim of that work is to make connections between God and the world of work. Many people who do not connect with God through their home and parish, have no idea that God is interested in what they do with their lives, including their worklife.

If I can quote from the beginning of Ken Costa's book (page 25) "many people do not see God as a 24/7 God, but as a withdrawn actor confined to a Sunday show with a declining audience. There is a widespread view that God and work simply don't mix: the competitive, cutthroat demands of the working world are seen as the obvious enemy of Christian compassion and love. **But** the God who created and sustains the world is also the God of the workplace. **If the Christian faith is not relevant in the workplace, it is not relevant at all.**" The point Ken Costa wants to emphasise is that if Christian faith cannot help us in our work, it cannot help us at all.

It flows from this that it is profoundly unhelpful to see a big division between a sacred world and a secular world. In God's eyes there is no such divide. It is all **his** world which **he** created. As John Stott used to say, "Jesus Christ is either Lord of **all** or he is **not** Lord at all." Jesus is Lord over work in the financial world and in every other area of work, just as much as work in the church world.

Some of you may remember the millennium dome, which is now known as the O2 arena, when it was a huge exhibition area around the time of the turn of the millennium, which attempted for a year to divide life in the UK into various spheres of activity. Some of you may even have visited the part of it called the "God zone." Some felt this gave an unhelpful message because it implied that the other **work** zones were "God-free".

Christian faith is for all of our lives: God loves you just as much when you are at work, as he does when you are at home or at church. But the point is that we will take our faith to work only if we know that our work is valuable to God.

## God at work

So, how do we know that our work – whatever it is - whoever we are doing it for, is valuable to God? Well, a very important reason why our work is of value to God, is because – God is a worker. Most profoundly, as we heard in our reading, we see God as the creator involved in the work of creation in Genesis 1 and 2.

It's very interesting in [Genesis 1.26](#), God says, "let **us** make" – plural, not singular. God in his very essence is relational. This is an expression of the Trinity, a perfect relationship between Father, Son, Holy Spirit, **working** together in unity. The vision is that God wants us to share on earth something of what he sees working to perfection in the divine community of the Trinity. God has created for us the same attributes of sharing, service, partnership, collaboration and interdependence, which are the very essence of his character and we have the opportunity to see these attributes in work today. The exciting truth is that the God of the Bible is not a passive, detached spiritual being, but a dynamic, active and entrepreneurial being. We saw in our reading from Genesis how God worked with extraordinary energy in creation to make the world, the animals and above all human life. After each day's work he had the great reward of reviewing each stage of his work, and seeing it was **good** ([Genesis 1.4](#)).

Moreover, life was created with the possibility of future growth and potential: he blessed the living creatures and commanded them to grow, and increase ([Genesis 1.22](#)) "*be fruitful and increase ...*" Also, although he felt good at each stage of the job he did not stop until the task was completed. Then he took time out and "rested from all the work of creating that he had done ([Genesis 2.3](#)). He had worked for a purpose to establish creation. Thus, work was God's idea in the first place. Work, matters, to God.

Jesus too was **used** to work: Jesus said in [John 5.17](#): "*my father is still working, and I also am working.*" And Jesus of course also, most likely, would have worked like many of his contemporaries in the family business of his father Joseph, as he grew up to the age of 30, before he started his three years' work of public ministry – Jesus was of course called the carpenter from Nazareth.

Just as Jesus worked on the earth reflecting his Father, so each one of us is made in the image of God. [Genesis 1.27](#) tells us: "*God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*"

Therefore just as God works, so each of us is made in order to work too. As God laboured in creation with all the benefits which that brought, so we are to do the same. And this of course is contained in [Genesis 1.28](#) when God gave humankind a creation mandate to be stewards of the created order – to look after what God had created. God wants us to establish a community on earth based on mutual service. Adam and Eve experienced fulfilment as human beings as they served God in their work of taking care of the Garden of Eden ([Genesis 2.15](#)). Work was in the original fulfilling creation plan of God.

But as we know from the Genesis story, Adam and Eve were drawn away from God, as they disobeyed his command not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. After this "fall" they had to make the harsh adjustment to work which involved futility and broken relationships – ultimately death entered the world as a result. Work became difficult "**toil**" ([Genesis 3.17-19](#)); the whole created order fell away from its cooperation with God – and as a result a living had to be earned by the sweat of our brows. Almost everything was different from that point on yet God's mandate to work remained the same: as it says in [Genesis 3.23](#), "*so the Lord banished him (Adam) from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.*"

But God, the creator, in his love wanted to restore what had been so spoilt and he worked to enable the broken model to work again. And so it was that Jesus came to earth with a mandate to repair the fractured working relationship between us and God.

### **Work – fulfilment or futility?**

This leads me to the heart of what I want to say this morning.

The truth is that work, now, exists in a tension between fulfilment and futility. As Ken Costa puts it: "on the one hand we know the presence of God at work, creating, innovating and filling us with energy. We see signs of his activity in the many ways in which we flourish at work and feel good about our achievements. On the other hand we know the futility of work, the lack of direction, the struggle to get things done and the frustration of difficult colleagues, stressful situations and plans not working out as we had hoped."

A vivid example is from the financial crisis of 2008. From my work as a solicitor I vividly remember the day in October 2008 when there were deep concerns about the financial stability of RBS. Nat West, as part of the RBS group, was the bank in which we held our client's money and clients were ringing up asking us to move their funds to a safer place! Ken Costa says in his book that Nat West came within only a few hours of running out of cash before the government intervened with an unprecedented recovery plan of public funding. He comments that this was the most challenging, intellectually stimulating, but deeply frustrating and challenging part of his career. This is often the case, he says, when we look at the workplace – we see apparent futility when we can't see the overall purpose. Fulfilment comes from finding meaning and purpose in our actual day-to-day work, **without** necessarily knowing that the whole system or an individual piece of work is going to be a success.

We need to remember that as Christians, we live, with hope, for the future. Because work was part of God's original plan for humanity, we know that he will maintain the best of the original creation when his kingdom fully comes at the end of history – when he calls into being the new heaven and the new earth reunited together ([Revelation 21 . 24 and 26](#)). Eternity will involve perfect work – the work of serving the Lord Jesus Christ ([Revelation 22.3](#)). Work will no longer be in anyway futile, and it will be utterly fulfilling - in accordance with God's original purpose. Even if we were given details of what this will be like in the united new heaven and new earth, our limited minds could not fully grasp it, but from what we are told in Scripture we can trust that it will be good and eternally fulfilling. So as Christians, we do have a future hope, which can encourage us to engage with the work we are involved in the meanwhile, despite its frustrations and difficulties.

This is not just about marking time until he comes again, but to engage with the building of his kingdom here and now on earth –playing our part in sharing his kingdom values of love, compassion, justice, freedom, in the lives of those around us, despite all the frustrations, as we await the full coming of his kingdom at the end of history. Eternal life starts here, as we live well for God.

Ken Costa's experience and reflection is that work will never be perfected until the return of Jesus, but until then it **is** possible, through the power of his Spirit, amid all the tensions and frustrations, to live and work together with a real measure of purpose, direction and enjoyment. It is possible for us to grow and to serve, and to influence the world for good, as we await Jesus' final return.

## **Conclusion: personal motivation**

I want to finish this introductory talk, with a reflection which I trust we can take into the week ahead of us, whatever it is we will be doing this week.

As individuals we each have a calling - a vocation from God, which is uniquely suited to our personality and skills – in other words, there is something which God wants us to do, which only we can do. It is as we identify the role to which God has specifically called us that our work can be infused with meaning and purpose, despite the frustrations we have talked about and we are all too aware of. In practice, we work for a variety of reasons – to support ourselves and any family we may have, to find personal fulfilment, to make a positive contribution to society – and of course to do the job we are there to do.

But it is good to remember that perhaps the ultimate overarching purpose of work is to **worship God**, in and through our work. You may have heard of the Westminster catechism which was written in the 1640s (and I apologise for the noninclusive language): the first question there is "what is the chief and highest end of man?" The answer given, is that "man's chief and highest end, is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever." We can glorify God and enjoy him in and through our work; our work can be a form of worship to God. In Hebrew, it is significant that the word for "work" (avad) is the same word for "worship". And the apostle Paul uses the same word for "manual labour" as he does for "Christian work".

If you want to remember a verse this week at work, I offer to you **Colossians 3.23**, where Paul urges: "whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters." This has the power to encourage and transform, in the daily routine and practicalities of work - if we remember that, whatever we are doing we are doing for him.

**Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are interested in the details of our lives, in what we do day by day. Whatever our circumstances and situation, help us to know your calling and to have a vision for how you want us to be and what you want us to do in our daily living and working. We thank you for your love, and for all you give to us. We ask that you will help us in our work, however we spend our days and we ask that, in everything, the Lord Jesus may be glorified. And we ask this, for his name's sake. Amen**

**RDB**

**10.1.16**

## 2. Being in the world

*Family Service & Parish Eucharist 17.1.16 delivered by Sue Phillips*

*John 17:6-19*

We're continuing our theme based on Ken Costa's book *God at Work*, and today looking at the theme of 'Being in the World'. Whether we are in paid employment, preparing ourselves for future employment, working in the home or like me retired and making a contribution to the community in which we live, we are all interacting with what Jesus referred to as the World; the theme of our second talk in the *God at Work* series.

Here's a test for those of you who were here for Part 1. What was the verse of Scripture Richard encouraged us to take into our week?

It comes from Paul's letter to the Colossians and was addressed to slaves **Col 3:23-24** 'Whatever you do work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord... it is the Lord Christ you are serving'.

I have to admit to that being a significant verse to me, in both my domestic and my professional life. At times when the task seems futile and the recipients of my labour ungrateful, it's been a way of maintaining motivation to keep on with the job, whether it was washing nappies or sitting through boring meetings! Seeing our work not as a daily grind but as an opportunity to serve God can be utterly transformative whether to the quality of the task, the value system within which we work or the quality of our relationships with colleagues or those who receive the output of our work.

But that's not the only thing Richard drew to our attention. I'd like to remind us of two other points that are relevant to our ongoing thinking

1. The God of the Bible is first introduced to us 'at work'. Genesis tells us how God created, ordered, reflected on his achievements and then rested. We are made in his image. A need to feel satisfied with our work is part of being human.
2. In Hebrew the verb *abad* אָבַד can also be translated worship.

Our theme today is about being in the world, the place where our work and our worship fit together. Like the Hebrew work for worship the Greek word for world - *kosmos*, has a double, or even triple meaning. *Kosmos* is translated as **world in the sense of people**, and **world in the sense of place**, and also **world in the sense of a system of spiritual values**. We've just sung the words from another part of John's gospel (*For God so loved the world*). In chapter 3 it says God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him will have eternal life. 'Whoever believes' obviously refers to individuals, to people. But when we read Jesus' prayer he is talking about his disciples being in a *place* called 'the world', and subject to pressure from 'the world'.

We've just read from that prayer in John 17:6-19\* and in it, the word 'world' is used 12 times. The world in this passage is the place to which Jesus came, and which he is going to leave. It's the place where his disciples are going to remain, sent and equipped by him. In fact if we'd read the whole prayer which continues to the end of the chapter, we'd see that the theme of *sending* comes out 7 times. Interestingly the Greek work for send is *apostello*, as a noun it's apostle.

In Jesus' prayer the world is also a place of spiritual danger and systems of thinking from which they need protecting. Did you notice when you re read the passage that the word *protect* is used 3 times in the context of the world.

So what has this to do with us? Well Jesus was praying not just for his immediate disciples but for all who would follow, and that includes us! He is sending us (apostello) to work in a place where we need his protection.

So maybe this is why Ken Costa describes the workplace as a battleground (p42), because it is often the place where we interact with values at odds with our Christian values; where the way success is measured can lead to the undermining of truth, justice and compassion; where personal achievement and business profit are sometimes arrived at by methods that are morally dubious. Ken's working world is the world of financial institutions where greed and self-interest are drivers deeply embedded in the organisational culture. But it's not the only working environment where as Christians we can experience a values clash, or moral dilemmas, depending on where we sit in the organisation. As Ken Costa points out whatever our position in our paid employment we are both managers and managed. We have an area over which we have the freedom to express our values, and we have aspects of work where the values of our bosses and those embedded in the organisational culture direct the way we achieve our goals.

Some years ago when I was living in Birmingham we ran a small group in our home. Most of the members were new Christians. One was a young woman called Karen. Karen worked in a factory in Balsall Heath. One of her workmates had been hugely influential in bringing her to Christ, and it all began in the tea break. Tea break conversation would be full of complaint, criticism and backstabbing, but one person would never join in the backbiting. Instead she always seemed to have something positive to say, something beautiful, like a butterfly she had seen or the tulips on the roundabout on her bus route to work. Karen was sufficiently intrigued by this person's willingness to go against the flow that she wanted to find out more about what made her tick. It was then that she discovered her faith in Christ, and the rest was history.

Ken Costa says that there are three things a Christian needs to function effectively in the World of the Workplace

1. We need to understand it, to be analytical, to come to grips with its culture and get to know and understand the people we work with and for but with what he describes as a Biblical world view.
2. We need to critique it, to critically examine the prevailing values, and be prepared to challenge them. How fully are people respected and supported? Is there a 'long hours' culture that mitigates against family life? Are situations manipulated or figures massaged to meet targets, whilst failing to deliver quality products or services? Where you sit in the organisation will affect the extent to which your voice can bring about change, but in citing his work as chair of the London Connection, Ken Costa illustrates how by being a listening ear within the system to the challenge raised by respectful protest from the outside, has served to question core values driving the market economy.
3. Drawing the world to Christ. We are sent as apostles, witnesses to Jesus Christ among the people with whom we work. People matter to God and as we interact with people at work we can pray for them, and who knows, like with my friend Karen we might have a profound effect on their spiritual journey.

So we are placed in the world, for most of us that will include the world of paid employment, it's a world that can be hostile to the God of justice and of peace, and for that reason Jesus has promised his protection, but it is also the world to which we are sent just as he was sent by his father. We are sent to observe and to understand and to interact. Just as a TV news channel has a full screen and a running text of breaking news, Ken Costa suggests that as we interact with the world we 'should constantly be running a biblical commentary on these events, interpreting actions and reminding ourselves that we can only truly come to understand the world in and through Christ' (p50) and to be ready to go against the grain to influence it for good in the power of his spirit.

**\*John 17: Jesus Prays for His Disciples**

<sup>6</sup>“I have revealed you<sup>[a]</sup> to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. <sup>7</sup> Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. <sup>8</sup> For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup> I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. <sup>10</sup> All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. <sup>11</sup> I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of<sup>[b]</sup> your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. <sup>12</sup> While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by<sup>[c]</sup> that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

<sup>13</sup>“I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. <sup>14</sup> I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. <sup>15</sup> My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them by<sup>[d]</sup> the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

**SP**

**17.1.16**

### 3. Ambition and life choices.

#### *Family Service & Parish Eucharist 24.1.16 delivered by Martin Allen*

Today we're on the third of our series of talks which are centred on God and Work – the book written by Ken Costa. In our first sermon we heard about how God ordained that work was a good thing. How He himself worked and how the actions of man created a fracture in many things which included work, so that now we have all sorts of issues about work and fairness, equality, access to work pay etc.

In our second talk we heard about how we need to be fully engaged with the world and part of it but also not defined by it - I am a child of God not a wage slave might be the slogan. We have that image of the newsreader and the tickertape underneath with internal dialogue with God. We can be doing our “work” whatever it is and do it for God.

Today our focus is on ambition and life choices, the third in our series from Ken's book and I'm drawing heavily too on a book called The Kings Cross by Timothy Keller.

<< Word association game – are the words negative or positive >>

Ok another then – **Ambition** .. Why?

It's interesting isn't it? How we think about words and how ambition can be thought about. As I've looked around to think about ambition from a Christian perspective it's interesting how much of the writing is from a viewpoint that Christians might view ambition as a bad thing - a negative attribute in a person or way to be. Certainly Ken talks a lot about how Christians can view ambition as a bad thing and not spiritual.

So we may react positively to the word but what does it mean?

*... an earnest desire for some type of achievement or distinction, as power, honour, fame, or wealth, and the willingness to strive for its attainment:*

*... from Old French, from Latin *ambitiō* a going round (of candidates), a striving to please, from *ambīre* to go round; see *ambit**

So that's what it means in a non-Christian setting. What does it mean for a Christian? Is ambition a characteristic we should display...? What does the Bible say?

**James 3:16** 'For where you have envy and selfish **ambition**, there you find disorder and every evil practice.'

**2 Corinthians 12:20** 'For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish **ambition**, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.'

**Galatians 5:20** 'idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish **ambition**, dissensions, factions'

**Philippians 1:17** 'The former preach Christ out of selfish **ambition**, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains'

**James 3:14** 'But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish **ambition** in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.'

**Proverbs 10:28** 'The aspirations of good people end in celebration; the **ambitions** of bad people crash.'

**Proverbs 11:23** 'The desires of good people lead straight to the best, but wicked **ambition** ends in angry frustration'

Not the most positive bits of definition or bible messages. However, there are some positive guides:-

**1 Thessalonians 4:11** *'and to make it your **ambition** to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you,'*

And ambition clearly features in some people's experience in the bible such as Paul's descriptions of types of people

**1 Chronicles 4:10** Jabez prayed that God would bless him and he was thought more honourable than his brothers.

*'Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain."* And God granted his request.

If our ambition is aligned with what God has called us to do then we are right to ask for his blessing o it so that we can make a difference in the world and bring him glory.

Let's look at a hero

The classic movie *Chariots of Fire* is based on the 1924 Olympics and two prominent runners - Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams. Both were gifted and successful athletes who carried the hopes of their respective nations on their backs when they raced. Eric Liddell was a devout Christian who represented Scotland. He was a missionary, and some believed he should give up the sport to preach, but Liddell believed that God had called him to race and to race for the glory of God. Harold Abrahams ran for Great Britain. He loved his country as well as the sport and was obsessed with winning. He studied the sport, threw himself completely into it, and made running his overarching passion. In the movie you see a clear contrast between Liddell and Abrahams. They both run, but they run for very different reasons.

In one scene Abrahams says, *"And now in one hour's time I will be out there again. I will raise my eyes and look down that corridor, 4 feet wide, with 10 lonely seconds to justify my whole existence. But will I?"* In a different scene Liddell says, *"I believe God made me for a purpose, but He also made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure."*

Tim Keller, in comparing the two runners as depicted in the movie, states: "Harold Abrahams was weary even when he rested, and Eric Liddell was rested even when he was exerting himself. Why? Because there's a work underneath our work that we really need rest from. It's the work of self-justification." \*\*

Abrahams seeks satisfaction and joy in the race, and it always eludes him. Liddell finds satisfaction in Christ and experiences His joy as he runs.

Let's look at a couple of other heroes. From one of his less famous books, *God in the Dock*, C.S. Lewis describes ambition this way:

*"Ambition! We must be careful what we mean by it. If it means the desire to get ahead of other people . . . then it is bad. If it means simply wanting to do a thing well, then it is good. It isn't wrong for an actor to want to act his part as well as it can possibly be acted, but the wish to have his name in bigger types than other actors is a bad one . . . What we call "ambition" usually means the wish to be more conspicuous or more successful than someone else. It is this competitive element in it that is bad. It is perfectly reasonable to want to dance well or look nice. But when the dominant wish is to dance better or look nicer than the others — when you begin to feel that if the others danced as well as you or looked as nice as you, that would take all the fun out of it — then you are going the wrong way."*

John Stott is helpful here as well. From his well-known, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, Stott shows us that ambitions for God *must* be big:

*“Ambitions for self may be quite modest . . . Ambitions for God, however, if they are to be worthy, can never be modest. There is something inherently inappropriate about cherishing small ambitions for God. How can we ever be content that he should acquire just a little more honour in the world? No. Once we are clear that God is King, then we long to see him crowned with glory and honour, and accorded this true praise, which is the supreme place. We become ambitious for the spread of his kingdom and righteousness everywhere.”* So endorsement from wise people.

How does this relate to our decisions about our lives? How does it help us decide which career to go for or which person to marry, which purchase to make?

When we face a choice in our lives how do we decide? Is our ambition God aligned? As we've heard, the focus of ambition should not be for ourselves but for God – “whatever you do, do as to the Lord” If we have God in our sights – he will provide the means. **In the book\*** Ken provides some useful checks for our decision making.

\*..

- Is God calling? Guidance – relationship so needing to speak often and talk
- Find a way
- “this is the way walk in it” Isaiah 30:21
- Navigation with a stationary boat
- Timing
- Signs to confirm the rightness of a decision made
- P67 ladders and the right wall – shorter term objectives
- Ambition divorced from god>> problems
- Ideas for direction - am i confident god is setting the agenda and direction
- Do I share the ambition and speak about it or?
- Do others believe in this too? ..\*

How does this relate to our passage today? Firstly we are to rejoice in all situations, then if we set our ambitions to Godly ones and present our prayer requests in line with His will we have the assurance that we can have peace and lack of anxiety. The context of the anxiety mentioned is Paul praying for them to have strength for when they stand in front of councils or face persecution – a very different proposition to how we might read it. We also have some pretty good criteria to judge a life choice against:-

Is it:-

- Noble
- Right
- Pure
- Lovely
- Excellent
- Praiseworthy

Then it could well align with Gods ambitions for our lives. The giant pin art frame. When we align our ambitions with God's then there may be a sense that, like the ladder in the game, we go in a direction that goes well – and that when we don't we slide down. I'm not for one minute advocating a gospel of wealth and success for all if we have ambitions for God, but perhaps one of the things we need to sense is whether God/the wind of the Spirit is blowing through what we are about. We also need to make sure our ladder is against the right wall!

So in summary: - Ambitions aligned with God's will are fine for Christians and he wants us to be ambitious about his Kingdom. In following his path for our lives there is a peace and assurance as we align our life choices to his ambitions.  
Amen

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## The Story...

First penned by China Inland Mission worker, Frank Houghton, at a time when persecution in China was at its height, "Facing a Task Unfinished" has been a rally cry for missions in the Pacific Rim for many years. In 1929, the Lord laid a vision on the heart of CIM leaders to see 200 new workers plunge into the darkness and share the light of Christ, knowing that it could well cost them their lives.

As he reflected on Jesus' words in Matthew 24:14 to bear the torch of the Gospel to all the nations, his heart was broken for the people of China, and he wrote:

*Facing a task unfinished, that drives us to our knees.  
A need that, undiminished, rebukes our slothful ease.  
We, who rejoice to know Thee, renew before Thy throne,  
the solemn pledge we owe Thee to go and make Thee known.*

By 1932, the last of the 200 missionaries had set sail for China to spread the good news of the Gospel. Since that time, the church of China has grown from an estimated 100,000 who claim Christ as their Lord to millions, and the Lord continues to work in great ways because of the faithfulness of those that gave their lives proclaiming that Jesus died and rose.

We are delighted to introduce this missions hymn to a new generation with the prayer it will be an anthem for rising up to face the unfinished task and going to all the world to proclaim salvation in Jesus' name.

## 4. Tough Decisions

### *Family Service & Parish Eucharist 31.1.16 delivered by Mick Fletcher*

As you are aware, we have, over the past few weeks and in the next few weeks to come, we have been and will be talking about Ken Costa's book *God at Work*.

Today we are looking at the area of Tough Decisions at Work.

I do not think there is one person here today who in one form or another has not been affected by the decisions taken by some person in banking, government or industry. Ken Costa in his book tells us that in his opinion when having to make decisions and addressing values in the workplace, firstly our relationship with God provides the context for decisions that have to be made. Secondly we need to look to the Bible which in itself gives us a moral framework to work from. Thirdly we have within ourselves what Augustine call "a kind of silent clamour of truth ringing inside of us", as we all probably remember from the film *Pinocchio* the character of Jiminy Cricket, our conscience! Lastly we look at the consequences of our actions upon not only ourselves but, more importantly, on others.

Throughout history the workplace has changed greatly. Gone are the days of the Middle Ages and of the feudal lord who had control of life or death over all his workers - to many of the landowners their "possessions". To the times of the industrial revolution and the use of many of the steam and mechanical machines to increase production. Here then was the start of the age of Britain's great rise in the industrial league. But in this rise came sadly a cost to many. Some in the mills in the north, which was immortalized in that well known hymn by William Blake, "Jerusalem", which refers to those dark satanic mills.

During this period in history we start to see a gap opening up between the owners and the workers, which in turn saw the rise of the unions and the beginning of the Labour Party. But at the same time we have the opposite side of the coin, where, not far from ourselves in the guise of the Cadburys, we see owners who recognised that if their workers were in a safe caring work environment production was increased. Workers who were trained stayed in their positions so that long term production was achieved. Also Cadburys housed their employees, supplied them with medical help and with their children's schooling.

Ken Costa tells us when we have to deal with people's lives at work we need wisdom. Wisdom he says, is doing what's right and comes from God. It is the Biblical term for this "on earth as it is in heaven", everyday living.

A college degree is no certification of wisdom. Nor is it primarily concerned with keeping us out of the moral mud puddles of life. He tells us that wisdom has to do with becoming skilful in honouring our parents, raising our children, handling our money, conducting our sexual lives, going to work and exercising friendship and leadership, using words well, treating friends well, eating and drinking healthily, and most of all, not allowing anything to take precedence over God.

Sadly man's greed and his power lust was seen at the beginning of the last century. During this period of time the world suffered greatly - during four long and heart breaking years of war the world suffered the loss of the prime of its youth. But, during this time, because all the young men were at war, the women had taken their places in the factories. Women it seemed were on the move. After years of being treated as second class citizens women achieved the vote and took their rightful place in society. During the twenties and early thirties life for many became quite good, at least in the West.

Ken Costa tells us that when we are making difficult decisions, it is more important to look carefully at what could potentially go wrong, rather than focusing on the potential benefits or profits.

Sadly, greed in its rawest form in the twenties saw dealers and shareholders and many ordinary people who were looking for a chance of making easy money. In the United States on the 29th of October 1929 they saw their chance of making a profit disappear. The Wall Street Crash not only affected the USA, it had a worldwide effect on all the major nations. Unemployment was at its highest, starvation was known in countries which had never known it before, street beggars were seen on a daily basis, soup kitchens a life line. People in times of trouble pull together, but who would have thought that in Germany the resulting aftermath would have been the rise of the Nazi party and the devastating loss of life that the Second World War would see.

I was born after the War when food rationing had nearly finished. Shortages were still evident, in fact sweets were a luxury in their own right. I remember that! The war had taken its toll on this nation and upon the whole world. But, for all it had taken away, and that was a great deal, it had given back something that would probably not have happened naturally – the country had been forced to work together because of the threat of

- 1) the invasion of England,
- 2) the lack of men who had been enlisted into the army, and
- 3) the shortages of foodstuffs and all the things required in industry because of the Battle of the Atlantic and the invasion by Japan of Borneo and Malaysia, which then cut off our rubber and oil supplies.

But, while there was a lack of many things, this country was rich in good leadership. Even after the evacuation at Dunkirk, Winston Churchill instilled back into the people a sense of “pride”. People were made to feel important, life in the workplace was good, Britain and the world was on the mend. Jobs in the sixties were plentiful, industrial growth was massive. This was the Nuclear Age, a new age of mass production. Whilst this may seem to be the promised land, for many it unfortunately saw the end in many cases of the individual employee, known to management by name, who now became a number. But this gave way to the forming of “Personnel” (now Human Resources) which in many cases became a helping hand, a caring link.

Ken Costa asks us “Profit and responsibility, can we have both?” He tells us that one of the areas for decisions is how to balance the needs of the wider communities against the need of making a profit. For many in management, the idea that a corporation should try to embrace a wider agenda is a breach of the fundamental understanding of the need to maximise profit to the benefit of the shareholders. Here we have the impasse between unions and large companies, and the years of strikes by the car manufacturers, coal industry, shipping, fire service... it seemed that everyone wanted to strike. Even the Government became involved, the Army taking over when the Fire Service walked out. The energy crisis when the country was lit by candle light for a time. The violence on the picket lines, Red Robbo, Arthur Scargill, the hatred by mining communities of Margaret Thatcher which is alive to this day. It seems we never learn. We seem to go through stable times and then chaos raises its ugly head

In 2000 we started to see problems in the banking industry. In 2000 itself Equitable Life, in 2008 Northern Rock, in America, Lehman Brothers, then the Royal Bank of Scotland, banks in Spain, Germany, Italy, Greece, once stable organisations now seemingly a risk to shareholders and savers alike.

General Omar Bradley, in charge of one of the beaches during the invasion of Normandy is quoted as saying “We have become a nation of technology giants and moral pygmies”.

Ken tells us that his view is that if major corporations act responsibly out of a sense of being good global citizens, then the friction between the developing and the developed world will be mitigated. He goes on to say that employers have a responsibility towards people. It is important for all employees to know that they are valued irrespective of their gender, marital status, nationality, faith background or sexual orientation. But is it important for employees to respect the values of the organisation in which they work.

How do we go forward to make these hard decisions of life? First of all our relationship with God and knowledge of the Bible should provide us with the moral courage to assist us in life. The ability to show compassion to those whose lives we may have to change, to learn from mistakes, and allow God to change us from within.

Someone once said to me, “It is good to look up to someone, but never look down on anyone”, which I have always found helpful.

Amen

### *Proverbs 3:1-15*

*My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity.*

*Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favour and a good name in the sight of God and man.*

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*

*Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.*

*Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.*

*My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.*

*Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her.*

## 5. Work Life Balance

### *Family Service & Parish Eucharist 7.2.16 delivered by Graham Clark*

We've come today to the next chapter in Ken Costa's book "God at Work" which we are using as guide to explore different aspects of what it means to be a Christian in 21st century Britain.

Most of us work, have worked or are going to work in the future. Whether that work be as a paid employee, as a home maker or as a volunteer in some charitable enterprise.

As we have seen in previous weeks, work is important. God worked, in creation, and He still works today. Paul says to the Philippians "*I am confident that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion*". [Philippians 1:6](#)

Work gives meaning, confidence, dignity, self-respect, discipline, social interaction, as well as for some, money to support the rest of life.

But keeping work in perspective can be difficult. So making an appropriate work life balance can also be difficult, and this is not a new phenomenon. Subsistence farmers probably don't think about it much, they are too preoccupied with survival. Workers in the "dark satanic mills", which Mick spoke about last week, might not have phrased it that way but no doubt they would have liked more time to themselves.

The Bible doesn't say much specifically about a balance between work and life and that's probably because, in the ancient world, work life and family life were often integrated. Families worked together in their family trade, whether in agriculture or commerce. For much of human history, people worked on the family farm. Or your home also served as your butcher shop. Jesus probably didn't have to leave the house to do his carpentry with Joseph; they likely worked together within their own house. It wasn't until the industrial revolution and the rise of factories that more people worked outside the home.

Even though the modern world is significantly different from the biblical world, and the Bible doesn't use the same phrases we would use today, it still does speak to our need for work/life balance. A key verse which was quoted in our first talk on the subject of work is [Colossians 3:23-24](#): "*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*" So all our work is done on behalf of Christ.

A parallel verse occurs just a few verses earlier, in [verse 17](#): "*Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*" Again, whatever we do, in work or business, it is to be done in the name of Jesus, with integrity and a sense of Christian service.

But something jumped out at me that I hadn't really noticed before. The verses sandwiched in between those two verses are all about healthy family relationships. Wives and husbands are to be in loving relationship to one another. Fathers are not to embitter or exasperate their children. In other words, good work situations and healthy family relationships go hand in hand. This would have made perfect sense in biblical times when your co-workers were probably also your family members. Even today, unhappy family situations can prevent you from doing good work, and problems at work can cause conflict at home.

The phrase “work life balance” has come into vogue in the last fifty years or so as, on the one hand people have realised that there is more to life than work, but on the other hand the pressure to work long hours has never been greater. If you work for a big company you’ve probably been on a training course about “Work-Life Balance”. It’s one of the management-speak buzz words of the late 20th and early 21st century.

And despite the number of training courses and management hours spent on the subject, in essence the principle is simple – a satisfied, fulfilled person maintains a balance between the demands of work and the demands of the rest of life.

Ken Costa has spent all his working life in the upper echelons of management in a variety of high powered environments where work pressure and deadlines almost inevitably mean long working hours. So maintaining a balance is difficult. So what’s his solution?

**Firstly**, setting priorities. What’s important? What’s the most important? Most Christians would say that the order of priorities in our life should be, God first, followed by our core relationships (wife family friends) and then work. I remember as a child singing a chorus:

*J O Y J O Y surely this must mean  
Jesus first, yourself last  
and others in between.*

Does anyone else remember that? It seems to sum up that principle and it is no doubt based on Jesus’ re-telling of God’s commandments when He said “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself.*”

Now without wishing to be too controversial I have a bit of a problem with these priorities, but I’ll come back to that later.

Ken’s **second** way of achieving a work life balance is to manage time. We are all busy, and we seem to be getting busier.

There are all sorts of clever quotes about time – one of the James Bond films had a sub theme running through it “We have all the time in the world”, and this was playing in the background at the moment when his new wife was killed! A film maybe, theatrical device maybe, but there’s a relevant point in there somewhere.

Perhaps more meaningful would be Arnold Bennett’s words - “We shall never have more time. We have, and always have had, all the time there is.” And someone is quoted as saying, “No one has been heard to say on their deathbed, “I wish I had spent more time at the office”

The Bible gives interesting reflections on the “time” problem. The first and the most obvious is the establishment of the Sabbath, a day of rest. Jesus knew the value of the Sabbath and of taking time out. There are numerous occasions where he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath or went off by himself to pray. Whatever you do don’t forget the Sabbath, but it’s so well known that I’ll not say any more about it at this juncture.

Then we see the writer of Ecclesiastes who tries immersing himself in work but finds that it doesn't satisfy. He learns from this and subsequently writes in **ch3** "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;" and so on. Everything has its time, the implication being that that it is finite, it starts and it stops.

Another is an illustration of how Jesus managed time. In John ch11 he is told that his great friend Lazarus is sick to the point of death. Since his disciples knew he could heal the sick they would have been expecting Jesus to go running to help. But no, Jesus knows the bigger picture and the time is not right. He waits two days before he goes, Lazarus is dead when he arrives and Jesus performs the even greater miracle of raising him from the dead. **Timing!**

Ken next comments that compulsions and additions can twist the way we prioritise. We can become slaves to habits to the exclusion of other things. Addictions, anything from drug abuse to excessive exercise, can interfere with our use of time. Anything we put in front of God becomes an idol and the first of the traditional commandments says "You shall have no other gods before me".

So these are some of the thoughts that Ken Costa has in maintaining a healthy work life balance. But, as I said earlier, I have a bit of a problem with the idea of these priorities, and so I have a bit of a problem with the idea of a work life balance.

That implies that there are only two things that need to be balanced. But even the chorus I quoted suggests that there are three things which need to be balanced. I've never seen a balance with multiple arms so that you can balance several things. So, burn the list with the J O Y priorities on it! I'd like to try a different illustration.

*(picks up three juggling balls and attempts to juggle with them, then throws them to the audience)*

It's not a question of keeping two things in balance, it's a question of keeping lots of things, of keeping all the balls in the air at once. There can be many balls but for the sake of brevity I've kept it down to three. (There was no hope at all of me juggling with more than three balls and you can see that I'm not very good at that)

Let's have a look at the balls. What ball have you got? *(gets first ball back from the audience)*

This one says "**PLAY**"

This stands for all the things not encompassed by the other two balls. Our family, our relationships, our leisure time, our hobbies.

This one says "**PAY**"

So this stands for everything we do to earn money and to spend money. Our work, be that paid, unpaid or voluntary. Things that occupy maybe a third of our day.

This one says "**PRAY**"

This stands for our relationship with God. And I use the word relationship advisedly. When you get married you don't get the "marriage religion" you enter a relationship. When you follow Jesus you don't get the "Christian religion" you enter a relationship.

We spoke about Lazarus earlier. On another visit to their house Jesus commended Martha, Lazarus' sister, because she wanted to spend time building a relationship with Jesus rather than doing the housework.

This is a critical relationship! As Jesus said we must *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”*. This is all-consuming. If you do this sincerely there's apparently not much room left for anything else.

So this is the critical ball because it sticks everything else together.  
*(sticks the balls together using the Velcro strips)*

If the relationship with God is right then it will pervade everything else. If everything you do is influenced by your relationship with God it will work. If God is in your work, your human relationships, your leisure time, then everything will be in balance.

Jesus didn't teach us how to juggle. He taught us how to live an integrated life. And to quote another chorus *“He taught us how to live in harmony.”*

Amen.

GC  
7.2.16

## 6. Stress at Work

### *Family Service & Parish Eucharist 10.04.16 delivered by Martin Allen*

So today we are returning to the theme of God at Work based on the book by Ken Costa of the same name. The theme today is “stress at work”.

Just a couple of notes:-

For work I mean any activity be it paid, unpaid, voluntary or otherwise in the home outside of home etc! What do we mean by ‘stress’ - is it the same as pressure? Well no - quite rightly Ken points out that pressure is a perception of external force or having to do things, stress is an internally generated response to external pressure - what I put myself under.

So pressure may be a positive thing in us doing things.

Stress clearly has some medical overlaps and pressure may not do so- stress can rob us of appetite sleep physical health and perspective. Stress - that internal feeling - disturbs us can lead to fatigue and burnout. I wonder what Jesus life was like?

Presumably it was easy to be the eldest son in a family where carpentry was the way of earning income, with probably no father around and mouths to feed. And then it must have been easy to leave family and go off on a carefully arranged preaching tour of the Middle East with good transport connections, comfy beds to sleep in and a retinue of experienced flunkies who could keep the great demanding unwashed of the towns and countryside away from him... Well no, probably not...

There are many examples of him only being able to get down time late at night and away from the disciples, of falling asleep in the boat, waking to calm the panicked disciples and then almost immediately going off to heal Jairus’s daughter. Then there were the hopes and aspirations of his family and all those round him who hoped he was “the one”, “the messiah, and initially people supported him but all that soon changed.

The Risen Jesus was also not immune to people trying to mob him - with the appearance to the fishers suddenly he has the stress of Peter jumping into the water to be with him and then has the task of charging Peter to look after the sheep.

So if stress is a part of Jesus’ life and ministry and part of ours how should we cope with it? The book suggests a number of strategies and I’ll quickly run through some of them (and then there is a chance to try them out.)

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#### **Activity - six activity areas are laid out within the church**

##### 1. *Relaxing with balls*

*Sally Bubbers uses these in her work:-*

- *Holding a ball, breathe to the count of 3 in and 4 out as this helps activate the calming part of the brain. DO make sure to breathe gently at your own pace, gradually slowing and deepening the breath. Breathing too deep, too fast you can get giddy/scared or panicky - which is not the object.*
- *the colours can be used like a 1-10 rating scale for stress/activation - reading the blue (calm) to red (active)*

- the ball can be used as an 'active pause' ([activepause.com](http://activepause.com)) for people who need calming before they are able to use the breath to help calm them by holding the ball and squeezing it and noticing the colours/tension in hand and arm (brings them into the present)

## 2. A Time to worry

The idea here is that when we feel anxious about anything in paid or home work we set it aside. We set aside a time in the future to return to the problem and think about it for a defined time period preferably under 15 minutes, then either leave the worry at the cross or stop and return to it at another time. It's a question of developing this as a habit and returning to it

## 3. Colouring

You might think this is for children but colouring a "mandala" or picture can help distract you from worry – especially if there is a helpful text /bible verse. Have a go!

## 4. Clay

Kneading, pummelling, designing, playing with clay can be another way to reduce stress and anxiety. As you play consider the scriptures below...

### Jeremiah 18

<sup>1</sup> This is the message that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup> "Jeremiah, go down to the potter's house. I will give you my message there." <sup>3</sup> So I went down to the potter's house and saw him working with clay at the wheel. <sup>4</sup> He was making a pot from clay. But there was something wrong with the pot. So the potter used that clay to make another pot. With his hands he shaped the pot the way he wanted it to be. <sup>5</sup> Then this message from the LORD came to me: <sup>6</sup> "Family of Israel, you know that I can do the same thing with you. You are like the clay in the potter's hands, and I am the potter." This message is from the LORD.

## 5. Cast your burdens

Hold a pebble or stone in your hand, think about your worry or anxiety, name it then drop it into the bucket and watch it sink to the bottom. Leave your stress and worry under the waters.

## 6. Candle cross and bible

At this simple quiet place there is space and peace to sit quietly before God and look at the cross the candle and or the bible. You might like to hold a holding cross as you do so – please take one away with you.

Some of these techniques are easier to do than others when you are being active and moving – some are better for sitting. Do take a stress ball or two with you, a colouring sheet or a holding cross – put them in a bag or pocket to use...

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Stay healthy – this may range from eating the right things to exercise or sleep and rest. One example of "good mental health" is a relaxation technique Sally uses with coloured balls –check out the table area with that.

Fight fear – we might have a sense of fear but if we are in Christ then our bible reading centres us and reminds us – we may fear what will happen but we can trust and be assured of our redemption and heavenly future. Perhaps if we anticipate a bad day ahead then rereading Gods promises can remind us of the unassailable nature of our salvation.

## Romans 8:31-35

<sup>31</sup> What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

I love the phrase ‘I know not what the future holds but I know who holds the future (in his hands).’ Considering that the person who made that phrase known had been incarcerated in Ravensbrück and was then able to forgive one of her captor guards, it’s a good maxim to keep in mind.

Be joyful –look for something to give thanks for - count your blessings and name them one by one - developed as a habit it becomes natural and second nature to us.

Stay connected to people – if you’re under stress fix to connect to friends, family or who is around who understands you, not necessarily to discuss your stress but just normal life.

Minister in the opposite spirit – when cursed bless.

Take control of your thoughts – if they are gloomy and negative then remember **Philippians 4:8** ‘...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.’

Try not to get into negative loops again try positive thoughts, positive vibe music and maybe CBT. One idea from this is “a time to worry” and there is a station explaining that a bit today.

Read the bible and pray –works in lots of different ways for people - sometimes it’s the lectio divina way of endlessly reading and rereading; sometimes it’s the in depth academic study; sometimes it’s the quiet reading in a group or it may be a mindfulness way of considering a passage; for those with a musical ear it may be a chant or a response.

Finally though we have Jesus words to enfold us:-

## Matt 11:28-30

<sup>28</sup> “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

## 7. Money

### *Family Service & Parish Eucharist 17.04.16 delivered by Richard Bubbers*

#### **How can/may we respond to the grace of God: 2 Cor 8:1-15**

We have come to the subject of money and giving in our series on "God at work" – we have been using the book of that title by Ken Costa - and by work we of course mean paid employment, but we have also broadened it out to include whatever activities we spend our days being involved in.

#### **God's grace**

Today in our services, we are thinking about God's grace – his unconditional love and mercy towards us, and how we may respond to him. As we approach the subject, it is helpful for us to remember that, apart from the kingdom of God, the theme which Jesus referred to the most in the Gospels was our attitude to money and possessions.

Jesus had a special concern for the marginalised and the poor. He also ate with the rich and privileged (e.g. [Luke 11:37](#)), enjoyed the wedding feast at Cana ([John 2:1](#)) and accepted, without any hesitation, being anointed with extremely costly perfume ([Matthew 26:7](#)). As Ken Costa puts it, "... he lived passionately at both ends of the human scale – he was not embarrassed to look at issues of money and possessions, even if we find it difficult." Indeed, Jesus said in that classic verse in John 10:10: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Martin Luther said, "there are three conversions necessary: conversion of the heart, the mind, and the purse." These issues are important, if we want to grow as Christians, and for God's work to grow, wherever he has placed us.

Our text this morning comes from our reading in [2 Corinthians 8:9](#) (page 1163 in our pew Bibles) "**for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich**" – "though **he was rich**, yet for **your sakes he became poor**, so that **you through his poverty might become rich**."

In a nutshell, this verse describes, very simply, what God did for us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He, though he was rich, became poor for us, so that we might become rich.

And what riches are we talking about? We could say much about these riches, but through the Gospel it is possible for us, amid the brokenness and failings in the world around us, to have a restored and renewed relationship with our creator God, our loving heavenly father, who loves us beyond our wildest imagining – we have the possibility of knowing, through Christ, what it is to have a truly full and abundant life, which is both in this life and in a life beyond, knowing the life which our Creator God always intended us to have.

How could God love you and me so unconditionally – is the wonderful question. Ours is a gospel of grace. The good news of the gospel is all about God's grace and generosity and unconditional love towards us. There is nothing which we can do to **earn or deserve** God's grace - otherwise Jesus would never have had to go through the awful horror of the cross.

To help us to see this, I'd like us to pause for a minute, and for each of us to consciously take a breath in. I wonder how many atoms of oxygen you think you have just breathed into yourself? One million, million, million, million atoms of oxygen. Then to really try to get us to have a sense of how to see this,

please can you imagine that just one of those atoms is as big as Wembley Stadium. Proportionately, would you believe it, the nucleus in the centre of the atom (which contains the neutrons and protons), is merely the size of a **pea**.

I give you this illustration because for some things in life we cannot always see the world in the usual way that we do, when we are going about our lives in the ordinary way day by day. The Bible talks about having a different way of seeing the world – Paul in **Romans 12** talks about our being transformed by the renewing of our minds. So, to understand how grace works, we need to see the world in a different way.

Many grew up with the image of a mathematical God, who weighed our good and bad deeds on a set of scales, and always found us wanting. Somehow this missed the God of the Gospels, a God of mercy, forgiveness and generosity, who keeps finding ways to shatter the relentless laws of what we can call, non-grace. It is as if God has torn up the old mathematical tables of calculation and merit, and introduces the new maths of grace: he loves us as we are, for who we are, and all we can do is to accept his grace - his love, freely and undeservedly given.

It is not that God will love us **if** we change: God loves us, so that we **can** change. The gospel is not about the fear of not being good enough. It is about grace – God's love, freely offered, to you and to me. And when we come to ask the question, “how do I respond to such grace”, this is not about a response which comes out of obligation – that would be to misunderstand the whole nature of grace, which has nothing to do with what "**ought**" to be done - it is about a response which comes freely and gratefully out of a profound sense of gratitude for the benefits of his grace.

A few months ago, I was struck when I visited a church in Birmingham and they had a notice which said, and I quote: "people sometimes think that the church has vast resources and doesn't need financial support. That's not true. Every parish church like ours depends wholly on the financial giving of members, supporters and friends."

### **Our response**

The important thing, therefore, for us this morning, is to look at the New Testament principles which can guide us, as we each seek to work out how we may respond to his unmerited grace and generosity, freely given. When applying these Bible principles, we need to remember the foundational principle that our motivation for our response to God is all-important: in **1 Corinthians 13:3**, in his classic passage on love, Paul says: "**if I give away all my possessions (all my possessions) but do not have love, I gain nothing.**" It is very important that we do really reflect on God's grace to us - all that God has done, and is doing, and will do, for us, so that our financial response can come out of our **love** for him - and not out of any sense of obligation.

In our chapter [**v.12 and 1 Cor 16:2**], Paul teaches the importance of proportionality– in other words, it is important for your giving to be a **proportion** of your income. Now many Christians have found the Old Testament principle of tithing –giving 10% – to be a very helpful guide to giving - and something which God has very much honoured in their lives. The New Testament does not lay down a precise proportion to give - the teaching is very much focused on the **attitude** of the giver - but in the light of what the New Testament says about God's grace and generosity, many Christians have found tithing to be a very useful starting point, when it comes to our giving back to God.

The Church of England recommends that our initial target should be to give 5% of our net income to the local church, and to give the rest to other good causes we wish to support. This is not something which

should be legalistic or prevent our being generous, as this would go against the whole spirit of how the New Testament talks about giving. There is nothing to stop us responding, for example, to specific appeals for fund-raising, and indeed the opposite is the case, if we are giving out of God's generosity to us.

The important thing is not so much the precise proportion, but that we see our giving in a proportionate way. If we are concerned about the regular needs of our church here in its mission and ministry, the important thing is that we begin to see our giving as a proportion of our income. If we can begin to do this, God is able to use it – indeed, he will honour the attitude in this response, and this will be seen in how the church's financial needs are met by the church's income – in a way that only God is able to bring about.

If enough of us at St Laurence's can respond to God, after prayerful reflection and consideration, in a proportionate way, I do sincerely believe that there will be enough, financially, for what God wants to do in this place, in the mission and ministry of his kingdom, here.

St Paul goes on to say in [2 Corinthians 9:6-7](#)

**“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”**

Paul is here encouraging us to think through and **plan** our giving. He would not want this to prevent spontaneous generosity, as he wants us to be "cheerful" in our giving, but an advantage of planning our giving is that it allows us to allocate money upfront, and prevents us from treating what we give as an afterthought. Also for regular giving, if we do not make conscious decisions about how much to give, we are likely to give less.

If you can set up a standing order, this ensures our church of this income, whether or not you are able to be present on a Sunday for whatever reason. This also has the advantage that if you are a UK taxpayer and provide a simple gift aid declaration, the church treasurer can recover from your tax office the basic rate tax of 20% which you have already paid to the government, at no additional cost to you and with a considerable additional benefit to the church.

Our church treasurer, or churchwardens are happy to answer your questions: as you came in, I hope you received a standing order and gift aid form: there are also spare copies at the back of church.

We are this morning focusing on monetary giving, but giving of course is not just about money, but also about our time and our talents – which also includes our care, our compassion, our hospitality – everything in fact which we can bring to God, in loving response to his overflowing and generous grace. Proportionate, planned and regular giving is what is needed for the "bread-and-butter" expenditure which is needed every week/every month to maintain this church and all it seeks to do. This church is no different to any other body or family or individual: in order to live - and honour our commitments and obligations - we need regular income on which we can rely for planning and budgeting. If we want the church to be here, and to be part of this community, and to do what it is here to do in bringing forward God's kingdom, it is for each of us prayerfully to consider our response to the love and generosity which God has shown to us.

I do not pretend that these issues are not challenging: the needs are rising, not least in maintaining our buildings and paying our parish share. But I do believe that, if each of us who counts ourselves as members of this church, review our giving in a proportionate, planned and regular way, there will be

enough, financially, for God's kingdom work of mission and ministry here, through St Laurence's. God honours those, who honour him.

I would add that if you have any questions you wish to discuss about your giving here, please speak in confidence with our churchwarden, Graham Clark. If you wish to talk more about the spiritual principles involved in Christian giving, I will be very happy to talk with you – you will appreciate that that does not of course involve any financial details, for as your minister I do not know the details of who gives what.

I would therefore ask each one of us who regards themselves as regular church members, to take this home, and prayerfully to consider our giving: Sally and I are reviewing our giving in this way – let's each sit down and review our giving as a proportion of our income. The precise proportion you start with is not the most important thing: the important thing is that you look at it in a **proportionate** way and begin a habit of regular, planned, and proportionate giving, which God then is able to take and use for his loving purposes in this place and beyond. You may **never** have done this before: if so, make a start. You may have done this before, but not recently: if so, review it. When you have done this, you can return any standing order form and any gift aid form to the church treasurer or one of our wardens – or indeed return it in a sealed envelope, marked for the Church Treasurer, in the offertory plate at any of our services.

I do believe that, if we do this as the body of Christ here, we can claim the wonderful promise of God in **Malachi 3:10: "test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven, and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."**

I close with a short verse, which reminds us, of God's grace, to each one of us:

"What giving again, I asked in dismay, and must I keep giving, and giving, always.  
Oh no, said the angel, whose eye pierced me through:  
just stop, when the Saviour, stops giving, to you."

Amen.

RDB 17.4.16

## **2 Corinthians 8:1-15 The Offering**

Now, friends, I want to report on the surprising and generous ways in which God is working in the churches in Macedonia province. Fierce troubles came down on the people of those churches, pushing them to the very limit. The trial exposed their true colours: They were incredibly happy, though desperately poor. The pressure triggered something totally unexpected: an outpouring of pure and generous gifts. I was there and saw it for myself. They gave offerings of whatever they could—far more than they could afford!—pleading for the privilege of helping out in the relief of poor Christians.

This was totally spontaneous, entirely their own idea, and caught us completely off guard. What explains it was that they had first given themselves unreservedly to God and to us. The other giving simply flowed out of the purposes of God working in their lives. That's what prompted us to ask Titus to bring the relief offering to your attention, so that what was so well begun could be finished up. You do so well in so many things—you trust God, you're articulate, you're insightful, you're passionate, you love us—now, do your best in this, too.

I'm not trying to order you around against your will. But by bringing in the Macedonians' enthusiasm as a stimulus to your love, I am hoping to bring the best out of you. You are familiar with the generosity of our Master, Jesus Christ. Rich as he was, he gave it all away for us—in one stroke he became poor and we became rich.

So here's what I think: The best thing you can do right now is to finish what you started last year and not let those good intentions grow stale. Your heart's been in the right place all along. You've got what it takes to finish it up, so go to it. Once the commitment is clear, you do what you can, not what you can't. The heart regulates the hands. This isn't so others can take it easy while you sweat it out. No, you're shoulder to shoulder with them all the way, your surplus matching their deficit, their surplus matching your deficit. In the end you come out even. As it is written,

Nothing left over to the one with the most,  
Nothing lacking to the one with the least.

## 8. Failure, disappointment and hope

*Family Service & Parish Eucharist 24.04.16 delivered by Sue Phillips*

**Romans 8:18-28**

**Aim: to examine how the hope to which we are called can be expressed in the context of failure and disappointment in our daily lives especially in the workplace, using Ken Costa's book *God at Work* as a source.**

For many of us for most of our lives, our place of work provides a major context for identifying our gifts and developing our potential as people. The contract we sign up to with our employers gives them a power over our lives that is different from that exercised in our family and community life. As well as providing us with the income we need, work can be a significant source of personal fulfilment and satisfaction, it is also a place where we are likely to experience frustration, disappointment and failure.

For Ken Costa the workplace provides a context in which our faith is tested and where we can experience the grace of God *and put into practice the teachings of Jesus*. For some of us this is not necessarily paid work, so don't switch off if you are retired, seeking work, or having a phase of concentrating on family needs.

Today I'm drawing on Chapter 7 of Ken's book, entitled 'Failure, disappointment and hope'. I'd like to begin with a question. Can you remember an occasion where you experienced an acute sense of failure in a task you were expected to perform to perfection in the work place?

I spent a chunk of my working life conducting research in a 5\* rated University department. Maintaining this prestigious rating was extremely important. Everything we did was scrutinised. Whenever our results went public there was no margin for error. I remember how mortified I felt when a draft report I had written came back to me marked with red pen in the margin. Eventually I learned that the Prof with the red pen was my best ally.

My enemy became my friend but I had to embrace humility first. Then I could pass it on. In that University department I set up a group for other researchers, many of whom experienced a profound sense of rejection *when their work was found wanting*. We would support one another through the rewriting process and reframe that painful experience as an opportunity for development.

### **Truth decay**

It's not always easy to do that. The culture of the workplace can be toxic: competitiveness, criticism and defensiveness can lead to a lack of integrity and a culture of covering one's back. Ken Costa talks about the importance of addressing the 'truth decay' that exists in many places of work. One way we can do this, he suggests, arises when we hurt, or are hurt by, a boss or fellow worker. Instead of retaliation we are called to forgiveness.

**Forgive us our trespasses/sins/debts as we forgive those who trespass/sin against us/our debtors.... For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly father will also forgive you. Matt 6:12,14**

Lines of course from the Lord's Prayer; now we are used to saying this in church, and are often aware of how difficult it can be to really forgive those close to us, but how can we do this in the workplace?

Ken Costa says we *must* learn because our place of work is the context for living out our Christian lives. This means we need to be humble and prepared to admit our failings and ask for forgiveness, and we must be ready to confront when we feel hurt by the behaviour of our colleagues.

Forgiveness isn't easy. Sometimes it starts with forgiving ourselves. Sometimes it means taking time to get in touch with our feelings, especially if we tend towards the iceberg rather than the volcano in our reactions to hurt.

“Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it”. Mark Twain

When we've been hurt it is easy to want revenge, but the message of Jesus is that forgiveness is freely offered to us. Once we've got that, really and deeply, the accompanying command to forgive others is not so difficult to follow. There are things that help, like giving time for anger to subside and looking at the situation from the other person's point of view. But ultimately forgiveness means making a decision and acting upon it, often not just once, but maybe over and over again.

### **The exhaustion of hopelessness**

There are wonderful one-liners in Ken's book; the term 'truth decay' makes me smile, but so does the phrase 'we need to learn to reverse the exhaustion of hopelessness'

There's a great story in [John 21](#). Jesus met his disciples at a moment of hopelessness. They'd seen him die a victim of the powers that be, and decided to pick up the reins of their old lives and go fishing. They tried so hard, but out all night they caught nothing. As they approached the shore in the morning light there was a stranger on the shore, he asked about their catch. They replied 'we have no fish'. 'Throw the net out to the right' said the stranger. I can just imagine them thinking 'and what would you know about it?' but they did it anyhow, and hauled in a massive catch before they realised the stranger was in fact Jesus. This story tells us so much about the way Jesus wants to engage in every part of our lives.

Paul in Romans talks a lot about hope; hope arises out of frustration being reversed through perseverance. Hope ultimately supersedes all disappointment because the ultimate hope is in God's final liberation of this world from what Paul calls 'decay', all the myriad forms of suffering that exist in this world; things that we cry out against and over, things about which we sometimes can't even find words to express our anguish.

Ken Costa gives us 5 steps to reverse the exhaustion of hopelessness.

1. Turn to God, remember that he is interested in all our endeavours and provides us with all that we need to live fulfilled and godly lives
2. Face the facts: be ready to admit failure and disappointment. The facts are a radical reality. Anger and resentment are real feelings. God is the one who can work within us to change our situation.
3. Meditate on the scriptures. Many situations in the Bible can speak into our modern day. I've given the example of the overnight fishing trip, but the story continues with Jesus singling out Peter for a new task. Peter, who had let him down with big time failure and denial, was given the job of taking care of Jesus' followers. Many of the psalms can help us express both negative and positive emotions and Paul prays –

‘May the God of hope fill you with all joy and hope as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit’ Romans 15:13

4. Keep a journal: so that you can watch developments and see how often it is that good things emerge from those seemingly impossible situations, as God indeed gives us hope.
5. Persevere in hope. We have a choice. We can let disappointment constrict us, or we can allow living through disappointment to develop character and confidence in God’s power to sustain us.

I’d like to end by reading Jesus’s words from [Matthew 11:28-30](#) using the Message.

“Are you tired? Worn out? Come to me. Get away with me and I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

I can’t think of a better way to tackle the ‘exhaustion of hopelessness than to ‘learn the unforced rhythms of grace’.

#### Romans 8:18-28 New International Version (NIV)

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that[a] the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who[b] have been called according to his purpose.

## 9. Renewal: Rest in my love – stay connected

Family Service & Parish Eucharist 1.5.16 delivered by Richard Bubbers

### John 15:

We have come to the subject of spiritual renewal in our series on ‘God at work’ – we have been using the book of that title by Ken Costa - and by work we of course mean paid employment, but we have also broadened it out to include whatever activities we spend our days being involved in. This is the last in our ‘God at work’ series, and focuses on how we may sustain ourselves in our daily work, whatever that may be, paid or unpaid – and it also helps us to look forward, with hope, whatever our current circumstances may be.

### Introduction

Let me introduce our subject today by giving you a quote which Ken Costa gives us from the World Economic Forum - this is the prestigious meeting of business and political leaders, which you may have heard of, at Davos every year. This is what was said by the then President of Mexico, Vicente Fox *"no aspect of contemporary life is more notable and less understood, than the spiritual discontent and restlessness that is spreading worldwide. This unease is present among those who are safe and wealthy, as well as among the poor and desperate. We can now see throughout the world a rejection of crass materialism, and an intense undirected desire for spiritual rebirth."*

Ken Costa also quotes the words of the Queen when she was addressing the Gen Synod of the Church of England in 2006, and she reminded us of this spiritual hunger for meaning in today's society *"When so much is in flux, when limitless amounts of information, much of it ephemeral, are instantly accessible on demand, there is a renewed hunger for that which endures and gives meaning. The Christian church can speak uniquely to that need, for at the heart of our faith stands the conviction that all people, irrespective of race, background or circumstances, can find lasting significance and purpose in the gospel of Jesus Christ."* Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It can heal broken families. It can restore friendships and it can reconcile divided communities. It is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God's love.

These words, all the more wonderful because they are spoken by our head of state, lead us to the question: how in the busyness of our lives can we, or anyone, sustain a meaningful and stable inner life amid all the ups and downs of what goes on around us?

### Rest, in his love: stay connected

Ken Costa's response is to take us to the passage we had as our (gospel) reading in **John chapter 15** – you will find it on page 1083 of our pew Bibles if you would like to follow it. This is one of the great "I am" statements of Jesus: in verse one, Jesus says *"I am the true vine."* He is the true vine, and we are the branches.

When I lived in North London I inherited a vine which grew all round the outside of the house and into a rather ancient conservatory - the branches seemed to go everywhere and anywhere as long as they were connected to the vine. Once I cut them back, they withered and produced no fruit.

Verse 4 says *"remain in me"*- this can also be translated ‘abide’ or ‘rest’ in me. I'm going to use ‘rest’ in me.

Verse 9 defines what this means when Jesus says *"rest, in my love."* Then he goes further in verse 12, when he says *"love each other, as I have loved you."* The key to how we are to live is to rest in his love. The key, to be able to love as he has loved us and to enjoy fruitful lives (as described in this passage), is to rest in his love. To rest in his love is the only way to sustain ourselves amid the inevitable stresses and strains of working life, and of life generally. So this is a vitally important subject, and one we need to come back to again and again.

A modern way of saying this as Ken Costa points out is "stay connected" – stay connected to God's love.

The Christian life at the most profound and deeply satisfying level, is about being connected to and resting in, the limitless, boundless, abundant and overflowing love of God. It is what ultimately will happen freely and forever, when, after the end of history, God's people will be present with him – in a renewed and united heaven and earth – in the beautiful and wonderful age to come. But it also can be a reality in our lives here and now and as we look to the future. It can make all the difference to our inner lives and how we see the world and help sustain us in our daily lives, and indeed help us to flourish and give us meaning and security - and make us fruitful. This is how transformation can take place in our lives, and we can become more like Jesus. This is what Jesus was getting at when he said in *John 10:10 "I've come that they may have life, and have it to the full"* – abundant life. And also this is what Paul is referring to when he said in *2 Corinthians 5.17: "therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"*

If we rest in his love – and stay connected we will see the world in a different, new way. And this of course is what we are doing in our communion service. If you think about the word communion and break it down into its two parts, it has the meaning of being united, with, God – union, with ("comm" - the Latin for "with") him.

Rest, in his love: stay connected.

### **Living from a still centre (daily practice)**

But how can we help ourselves to rest in his love and stay connected? Is there any practice we can follow on a daily basis to help us?

At the heart of contemplative prayer is the still centre, even in times of conflict and suffering. Each of us can learn to become more aware of this still centre and this can help us to remain in his love and stay connected.

We can learn to become more aware of this still centre by growing in our practice of spending even just a small amount of time on a regular basis in silent, contemplative prayer - learning to be aware and present in the moment. This can remind us about resting in his love, and staying connected. We can make time – each day if possible – to be still, to come before the presence of God and to let go of all our thoughts and ideas. Our intention is simply to be with God who loves us unconditionally and accepts us as we are no matter what state our hearts are in – no matter what is going on in our lives at the time. As we practice this on a regular basis we can grow in our awareness of being centred in God, and his unfailing love and mercy. The truth is that each of us is constantly in need of God's help no matter how outwardly confident we might seem. The reality is that none of us is in control or able to meet every challenge that faces us.

In fact, the more I consider that I understand all that is happening around me and that I have my own personal resources to deal with the situation, the more it is that I am desperately in need of God's help. When we deny that Lord, and our need of him, the more we will fail and fall.

This sort of prayer acknowledges our weakness, and our inability of ourselves to live as we have been called to live - we are continually in need of God's help and mercy, and this kind of prayer puts us in a place where we can receive it and not try to deal with things in our own strength. We know within our hearts that we do not and cannot love as God loves us – even our best love is contains self-concern. Such prayer opens up new possibilities. Because we are resting in his love we do not get in the way and God can use our powerlessness.

Rest, in his love: stay connected

### **Impediments to (things which stop us) resting in his love and staying connected**

If this is so important why is it that we can find it so hard to rest in his love? What is it that can get in the way of our staying to his love?

As I close, I want to mention briefly two things.

1. The Teflon and Velcro effect. Neuroscience is now explaining how because of the way in which our brains have developed over time, and the human race has developed mental survival techniques, we find it extremely easy to remember negative or dangerous or fearful thoughts. The neural pathways, which can remind us of these thoughts are formed very easily without any effort on our part. This has been likened to Velcro – things stick really easily and firmly to Velcro and, in the same way, negative thoughts stay very easily in our minds and memories. However, the converse is also true. It can now be shown that for us to retain a good/positive thought, we need consciously to savour that joyful thought for at least 15 seconds. This has been likened to the Teflon effect, when nothing sticks, and things wash off very easily. Resting in Christ and being connected to him involves positive good thoughts, and we need consciously to savour these things if we are to help ourselves to be present and resting with him. So when you experience an example of God's love savour it, reflect on it, remember it. If appropriate tell someone about it. If it helps you, make a note of it in a spiritual journal, which you can refer to again in the future. So, be aware of the Velcro and the Teflon effect when you are seeking to rest in his love.
2. Be aware of your own ego – who is at the centre of your life? Who is your ultimate point of reference? Is it your ego or is it God? The ego naturally tends to separate itself and to defend itself and build itself up and does not like change. Our ego is of course very useful in getting us established in life but it finds it difficult to deal with the big things of life which we are talking about – love, suffering, death, God. The ego has been likened to what the Bible describes as our old self. By contrast, if ultimately not our ego but God has the central position in our lives we can discover our new or true self and we will be able to rest in his love. Paul talks in [Ephesians 4:20-24](#) about "*putting off your old self.... and putting on the new self.... to be made new in the attitude of your minds.*" If we can let go of our old self and discover our new or true self we will begin to be transformed and have a new mind/a new way of seeing, so that we can rest in his love, and stay connected.

This is what Jesus meant when he said in [Luke 9:24](#): "*for whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me, will save it.*"

As we come to our comm-union this morning, may we receive his love and mercy, and may we rest, in his love. Jesus says to us this morning - *John 15.9 "As the father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now rest, in my love."*

RDB 1.5.16

John 15 New International Version (NIV)

### The Vine and the Branches

15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. 17 This is my command: Love each other.