

**Seventh Sunday after Pentecost. 8 July 2018.**

**Second Sunday reflecting on Stewardship. Serving. Mark 6:1-13.**

I have been doing some research. In particular I have been researching HOOKERS. Who here would like to be a HOOKER? No? Well I suppose it could be said that none of us really have the right physique for that. Though it could also be said that many here are still quite FORWARD. If you don't want to be FORWARD, especially not a LOOSE one, what about being a PROP? It seems to me that being a PROP is a great supportive role, and sounds more complete. Being complete sounds good to me. Better than being only THREE QUARTERS, FIVE EIGHTHS or even just a HALF. After my research it is possible that I am even more confused about the positions played in Rugby League than I was when I started.

Which position will you play? It has been suggested that in some ways Christianity and sport have a lot in common: cooperation, teamwork, things like that, though from what I can see the analogy goes at least as far as a lot of potentially confusing terminology. Both use some strange words! While there are lots of people who enjoy playing sport, playing Rugby League, the connection between Christian life and any kind of sport breaks down when we look at one essential aspect.

Christianity is not a spectator sport. It is not something where most people watch while some people 'do'. That is not the idea at all. If Christianity and Rugby League, or any kind of sport, are close to one another then we are actually all on the field. None of us are in the audience, in the stands. Which brings me back to the question about which position you are going to play.

We may be tempted to think of the pews as benches from which to watch. And Anglicans have been said to have a particular fondness for the BACK ROW, but even in Rugby League that is actually a position on the field, so maybe that is where you are going to play!

We are all called to involved. We are all called into Christian living. That comes with being baptised. I have been ordained for a particular role in the life of the Church, but did you realise that you have also been ordained. Ordination to ministry comes with being baptised. For members of the church it is not 'will I be involved in some ministry in the life of the church?' but 'WHICH ministry will I be involved in?'

Mark chapter 6. This is not really very far into the journey. The first few chapters of Mark have a series of encounters, including the first encounters of Jesus with those who he calls to follow him. They also have lots of encounters in which there is high tension because Jesus is being put under pressure by people who are not very happy with what he is saying. If you had been part of that crowd who were beginning to follow and listen and learn, what might you have thought or even said. "Ok. I am here. He seems to be making a lot of sense. There is something amazing about him. I can see that this man is close to God. I will hang around and listen and learn some more." That sort of response makes some sense to me I think.

So, what did Jesus do next? Did Jesus tell the people around him that just observing was fine? Jesus didn't call for audiences or observers. He invited those around him to enter into the game, step onto the field, take up their part. He sent them out two by two. Not alone. Not just 'get out there' but support each other as you do. So they went and shared what they had seen and learned.

There is a meme which is going around Facebook. A guy sitting talking to Jesus. Jesus says "I want you to follow me." The guy responds, "On Twitter? On Facebook?" Jesus says "Let me start that again ..."

Last week we were thinking about being blessed. We are blessed. It is a starting point. It sets out heads into the right place. It sets the pattern for what happens next. This is about what happens next. We are invited into service.

Nursing. I am in awe of nurses and the way in which they are able to cope with a myriad of situations, the care which is offered, the knowledge they have accumulated, the skills which they display. I have had times in my life when I have been in their hands, and doctors too of course, and I am incredibly thankful for so much expert care which I have received.

How did they get to be that way? Some people are naturally caring and so seek out that sort of occupation. But how did they get to the point where they are able to be so effective at what they do? Over the years there have been many models for nursing training. I am using this as an example, but it applies to many other professions, including the preparation of clergy for ordained ministry!

In some places nurses have been trained 'on the job'. Those who are preparing as nurses start almost immediately in hospitals and places where they are engaging with patients, learning skills, trying them out, learning what works and what doesn't and building up their experience by DOING. Of course they don't always get it right. That is where careful mentoring and supervision is vitally important. People with experience accompanying those who are starting out is a time-honoured way of growing caring occupations. Not being alone but being accompanied.

Another model has been to take training nurses out of any clinical setting and to ensure that they have all of the knowledge needed to be able to be applied in any potential situation before unleashing them on any patients. This model has produced people who know a lot about what to do but putting things into practice is a big hurdle. How much is it necessary to 'know' before beginning to 'do'? Not just for nurses.

I suspect that there are some for whom the focus on knowing a lot before beginning to do makes the engagement with actually 'doing' a lot more daunting. We all learn in different ways but at some point we have to step out and make a start. I may know everything there is about cooking, ingredients, nutrition etc but unless I am in the kitchen doing it ... am I a cook?

I have heard people tell me that they are not able to engage in ministry in any way because they do not know enough, have not had sufficient training. I am not saying that training and learning are unimportant. Certainly not. But it is often actually important to begin with who we are and where we are and what we have. The twelve who were sent out two by two didn't have degrees in theology. It is about stepping up to do what we can with what is in our hands.

In the letters which are being distributed today there is an update on some of the things that have been done already responding to our 2020 Vision. There are lots of holes. There are lots of those areas which we have barely begun to touch. Look through that document. Where is the vision goal where you see yourself engaged? Gathering people for fellowship? Engaging with the community around us? Exploring ways of caring? Engaging in Mission, locally and beyond our community? Do you have a heart to learn and help with establishing more opportunities for others to learn? Do you have practical skills to offer?

Is there a musical skill inside you waiting to be expressed? Could you help to organise some of the new or existing ways in which we connect with each other, or with those who are coming new into our community, or those around us? Do you have a heart for connecting with children? Is drama your thing? Is the internet or advertising where you see your niche? Is it praying? Prayer is sustaining, supporting vital work which underpins who we are and what we do.

Our 2020 Vision is actually a broad vision of who we believe God is calling us to be. How we as a community are serving and will be. Where is your position on the field? Explore.

If I say Amen, as I usually do, it sounds like that is tied up in a neat package, that what I am saying is finished. But it continues ... play on!

**Paul Mitchell**