

3 A call to service



All who are baptised are called to worship and serve God – as the baptism liturgy itself reminds us (ANZPB/HKMOA, 390). We serve God as part of our response to God’s love and grace: in a sense all of our lives we are responding to something that God has initiated. One of the ways

in which we do this is through the ministry we undertake. All disciples of Christ, without exception, are invited into ministry (ie “ministry” is not just “ordained ministry”): we can sometimes offer several different kinds of ministry in the course of a lifetime. Ministry is linked to service – as the Catechism tells us:

“What is the purpose of ministry? It is to continue Jesus’ servant ministry in the world by witnessing to God’s reconciling love, to bring in the Kingdom of God, to build up the body of Christ, and to glorify God’s holy name.” (ANZPB/HKMOA, 932) So part of our call to service is a call to do what Jesus himself did when he lived on earth.

❖ ***Is the idea of “ministry” being about far more than ordination a new one for you? What difference does this make, to understand that every Christian is called to some sort of ministry?***

❖ ***What ministries have you been part of during your lifetime?***

Jesus’ ministry

Jesus was clear that service was a big part of why he lived, and that it should be equally important to all of his followers. Speaking to his disciples (some of whom had just asked to be given places of honour!) he told them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognise as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:42-45. “Son of Man” was a title Jesus used for himself.) Jesus not only insisted on this new way of being – a counter-cultural way which wasn’t marked by a hunger for high status and great power – he also modelled it himself. In human terms he didn’t have any power and authority, and explicitly rejected the power that

was offered to him by the devil when he was tempted in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13). He set aside his divine status and came to the world as a human being to dedicate his life to serving people by loving, teaching, and healing them. And he washed feet.

❖ ***“Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant” – how is the Church, and its members, doing at this? How good are we at imitating Jesus?***

A text about service

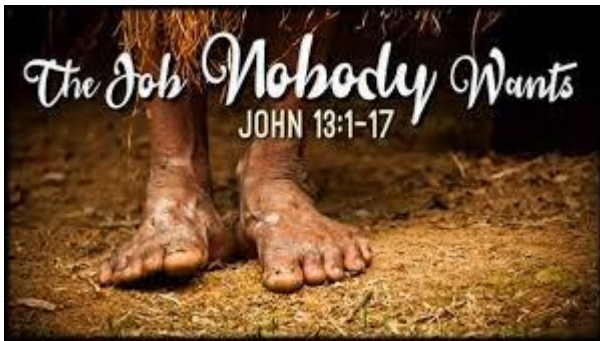
John 13: 1-17

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, are you going to wash my feet?’ Jesus answered, ‘You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.’ Peter said to him, ‘You will never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.’ Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’ Jesus said to him, ‘One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.’ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, ‘Not all of you are clean.’



After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.’

Back in Jesus' time people walked a lot along dusty roads and through open fields, and these were the same places as animals walked, so the washing and drying of feet before reclining at dinner was more than a useful social courtesy.



It was utterly necessary, and it was a job done by slaves or lowly servants. Jesus is fully aware of the status and authority he has, but in spite of this he gets up from the table, takes off his outer robe, ties a towel around himself, and pours water into a basin. He washes and dries the feet of his followers. Peter is right to

be horrified at Jesus performing such a menial task, and if we're not horrified on Peter's behalf, we miss the point of what Jesus did that night.

Jesus' action shows us someone who loved. After all, he'd spent three years walking around Galilee and Jerusalem with these people, he knew them and loved them, and he is about to go away. And his action is an example of humility, an example of service; it shows someone who didn't care about status. And yet, Jesus is acutely aware of the messages he's sending about status. Jesus accepts that he is rightly called "Master" / "Lord," and when he says that servants are not greater than their master the actual word used is "slaves." Elsewhere (John 15:12-15) he transforms "slaves" to "friends" because he has shared with them what he is doing. Is there an implication in this event, I wonder, that we are friends of Jesus when we are willing to act as servants to one another?

John's Gospel gives us the foot-washing as the key event of the Last Supper, whereas the other three Gospels don't mention it but instead concentrate on Jesus' actions with bread and wine, which we regard as the institution of the Eucharist. Foot-washing is one of the traditional elements of the Maundy Thursday rituals.

- ❖ ***What's your reaction to Jesus washing his disciples' feet? How would you have felt if you were one of them there that night?***
- ❖ ***If you have taken part in foot-washing on Maundy Thursday, which do you find it easier to do: to wash someone else's feet, or to have your own feet washed? What might that say to you?***
- ❖ ***Jesus commanded us to do Eucharist together, and that happens frequently (often once or twice weekly in many parishes); he also commanded us to wash one another's feet, and yet we only do that once a year. What would it do if we washed feet once a week?***

A biblical call story about service

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will

be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there



will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

The visit of the angel to Mary is usually seen as coming into the "birth announcement" genre (there are a number of examples of this, particularly in the Old Testament) but it's also a call story. It follows the traditional pattern of a call narrative: a greeting, a startled reaction by the person being called, encouragement not to fear, a divine commission, an objection (Mary's here is pretty brief – Moses' goes on for a whole chapter), a reassurance, and the offer of a confirming sign. Then comes the final response where the person accepts the call God is placing on their life.

Here Mary is being called to a particular task, the bearing and raising of Jesus. This is a call she accepts, with the words, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Two things stand out here: while the angel's greeting ("favoured one ... the Lord is with you") registers Mary's importance, her own words are far more humble: she identifies herself as the servant – literally the word is "slave" – of the Lord. And the wish that what happens to her be according to God's word parallels that of Jesus in

Gethsemane: “Not my will but yours be done.” (Luke 22:42) Mary is not simply Jesus’ mother: she is also a role model for all followers of Jesus: a servant of God who embodies faith and faithfulness.

- ❖ *How do you see Mary as a servant?*
- ❖ *Biblical call stories typically include the person initially objecting to what they’re being asked to do: have you ever objected to something God was calling you to do?*

Other biblical examples of service

Luke 10:29-37 The parable of the Good Samaritan
What might the Samaritan’s actions (and the non-actions of the priest and the Levite) tell us about service?

Acts 9:36-43 Tabitha/Dorcas
Dorcas was a widow who cared for others in practical ways, eg making garments. How are we using our time and our skills to serve others?

Acts 6:1-6 The first deacons
The early church appointed people to look after food distribution so that the Twelve could concentrate on preaching and teaching. What might this division of labour tell us about service?

Luke 10:38-42 Martha and Mary
One way of reading this is to see Martha as a deacon (serving at table) and Mary as occupied with the word: how might this affect our reaction to this incident?

The 3rd Mark: Loving Service



The Five Marks of Mission express the Anglican Communion’s common commitment to, and understanding of, God’s holistic and integral mission. The third of these is “To respond to human need by loving service” and this puts service at the heart of our faith. We’re all called to put love into action by caring for those in need.

There are many church (and other) organisations who do this – as do marae all over Aotearoa. Current examples include **City Missions** in a number of places

around New Zealand who support those in need with food support, help with emergency accommodation and housing, advocacy, health care, and social work support.

The social services arm of the Anglican Diocese of Waiapu, **Anglican Care Waiapu**, operates services and programmes in the Bay of Plenty, Tairāwhiti, and Hawke's Bay, partnering with local parishes and communities. Their mahi includes early childhood education, family services, programmes for older people, and grief services – all part of living into their mission “Living the gospel through loving service.”



- ❖ ***What service organisations are you familiar with?***
- ❖ ***Not everyone joins an organisation. What types of service can we do on our own?***

Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

- ❖ ***There's a mutuality in this hymn by Richard Gillard – people serve one another. What might that be saying?***

Meet some servants



Suzanne Aubert (Meri Hōhepa/Mother Mary Joseph Aubert) (1835-1926) was a religious sister who came to New Zealand from her native France. She worked with Māori (including in Hawkes Bay) and in Hiruharama – Jerusalem, and later settled in Wellington. She founded the order The Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion, who opened homes for the incurably ill and disabled children and provided nursing homes. The Sisters of Compassion continue to work actively towards the relief of human suffering in a variety of fields. She said, “A kind heart is the joy of everyone who comes in contact with it.”

Edric Baker (1941-2015) (Daktar Bhai) was a New Zealand physician who worked for many years in Bangladesh. He was committed to the provision of health services for the poor and the marginalised. He established the Kailakuri Health Care Centre in an isolated rural area in northern Bangladesh in 1983, and served there for the rest of his life. He died on 1 September 2015 (and is buried behind the house he lived in there), but the Centre continues to function as before – a testament to his work. A team of 90 staff – most without formal qualifications – serve 28,000 patients per year.



Jimmy Carter (1924-present) is a long-term volunteer with Habitat for Humanity. He and his (late) wife Rosalynn serve as advocates, active fundraisers and hands-on construction volunteers with the charity. He was the 39th President of the United States (1977-1981) and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for working to find peaceful solutions to international conflicts, advance democracy and human rights, and promote economic and social development. He said, “My faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I am, whenever I can, for as long as I can with whatever I have to try to make a difference.”

- ❖ *Think of someone you know who embodies the life of a servant: what makes them so?*
- ❖ *If you are doing this study with others, would your group like to take part in a service project this Lent? What might you choose?*

THOUGHTS / QUESTIONS

Closing Worship

You might like to close each session by praying together. Here are some possible prayers.

God of the desert,
as we follow Jesus into the unknown,
may we recognise the tempter when he comes;
let it be your bread we eat,
your world we serve and you alone we worship.
this we ask through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

God, you are working still,
breaking down and building up;
open our eyes to discern your hands
so that we may take our place
as labourers together with you.
Hear this prayer for your love's sake. Amen.

God,
give us work till our life shall end,
and life till our work is done. Amen.

**E tō mātou Matua i te rangi
Kia tapu tōu Ingoa.
Kia tae mai tōu rangatiratanga.
Kia meatia tāu e pai ai
ki runga ki te whenua,
kia rite anō ki tō te rangi.
Hōmai ki a mātou āiane
he taro mā mātou mō tēnei rā.
Murua ō mātou hara,
Me mātou hoki e muru nei
i ō te hunga e hara ana ki a mātou.
Āua hoki mātou e kawea kia whakawaia;
Engari whakaorangia mātou i te kino:
Nōu hoki te rangatiratanga, te kaha, me te korōria,
Āke ake ake. Āmine.**

