

Langton Long - Sunday 22 April 2007

Jennie Rake

"Worship Is ... Good News"

Romans 16:25-27, Matthew 5:14-16

“Let your light shine before men that they might see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

How do you react when someone praises you for something you have done? I suppose it depends what it was and why you did it.

! Some things we do because they are personal goals

! Some things we do for other people's benefit

Personal Goals

David has just received a letter of congratulation for working a whole year without any time off for illness or anything else. The best part of this was that he gets an extra day of holiday, but he wasn't too excited about being congratulated. I think it's because he expects to put his best effort into his work.

Some of us here may be able to remember how proud or embarrassed we have felt about be rewarded publicly about something special. Perhaps you won a race in the school sports and had to go and collect your certificate or medal? Maybe you did well at university and got dressed up in an academic gown to collect your degree?

Many people train hard for the London Marathon and although they may not expect to win it, they are pleased when they run it quicker than the last time. Olympic athletes also train hard to win a medal and just by looking at their faces at the medal ceremony you can tell how proud they are to have won a medal for their country.

These are all examples of people using their talents and allowing other people to see the result. That's what it means when we read in the bible about letting our light shine. We are not keeping our talents or gifts secret, we are using them and sometimes getting a lot of glory through doing well.

Is this being boastful or big-headed? Is it wrong?

When the news in the papers or on the TV is often sad or depressing, I am cheered up when I hear a good news story. It's encouraging to hear of people raising money for some good cause or of your football team winning a match or of a school listing the students who have done well in their GCE's.

I really wish we had more good news stories reaching the headlines and taking up time on the TV or space in the papers.

Doing good deeds for other people

Some people just hate this sort of publicity and would rather keep it to themselves. I know someone who raises a lot of money for charity but really hates it being reported in any paper or magazine. They don't mind telling you about it themselves, but that's all.

Quite often, people's praise can be a bit embarrassing especially when what we have done is for someone else's benefit. Our reason for doing well wasn't for our own glory.

In the reading we had earlier Jesus is telling us we are the light of the world! Have you ever thought of yourself as being like a light? On some days I feel the very opposite believe me. I expect we all have days like that. We feel useless, lacking in energy and our faith doesn't seem to be very strong. Life is such an effort and when we remember we are God's servants we wonder how anything is ever going to get done! But we are still supposed to be the light of the world and just as you don't cover a light over, so we should not hide our gifts and talents. We just need to be willing to be used by God and then be ready when opportunities come our way.

As I was thinking about this subject the other day I thought about members of this congregation and what some of you are doing as an expression of your faith.. Eileen has kindly agreed to be interviewed about what she does as a local contact for The Children's Society.

Q. I know you are involved with The Children's Society - which used to be called The Church of England Children's Society - could you tell us all, briefly, about the work of that organisation?

A. The Church of England Children's Society was founded by Edward Rolf in 1881. It was originally called the Church of England Central Home for waifs and strays. Edward Rolf was a Sunday school teacher. Two of his boys were late for class one day and so he went out looking for them. He was shocked to see so many children roaming the street without any home so he approached Archbishop Tait about the church taking some action. The Children's Society continues that work today, taking care of vulnerable children.

Q. What is your role in the local branch?

A. I'm the Box Secretary for the local branch. There are about 80 box holders in this area and I organise the annual box opening and help to organise a fund-raising event to coincide with this.

Q. I believe the next box opening will be taking place on May 3rd in the Corn Exchange, so if anyone here wants to get involved or have a collecting box of their own they can go along to that event or have a word with Eileen later on.

Q. Tell us how you got involved.

A. A lady from the parish church was thinking of standing down as Box Secretary

and she approached me about taking on the job.

Q. So getting involved is directly linked to your Christian faith?

A. Yes, that's right.

Eileen's faith has led her to an active part in raising money for compassionate work. There are others here whose faith has led them to similar activities - Enid and Henry with Mercy House in Thailand. We are reminded in the bible to follow Jesus' example in action and in prayer.

Let's get going - but what can we do?

If we are good at something, let's use it for helping others - let's use it for God's kingdom. Let's not be mean about the gifts or energy or time that God gives us.

A gifted pianist or singer could decide to practice and perform for their own pleasure - what a waste!

A good organiser could use their time and energy purely for their own household - very commendable in a way - but how much better to use some of that for helping others!

Prayer for ourselves, our own concerns is not the only answer. Prayer for others and how we can help them is just as important.

Some of you may be thinking, "I'm too old, too young, too busy, not well enough, not gifted enough to do much for God." This is where prayer can be the best thing you can do. Let me read to you about a faithful lady who has supported Adrian and Bridget Plass in their ministries through her prayer.

Extract from "Blindspots in the bible"

'Many people suffer from feelings of spiritual inferiority. They are undoubtedly followers of Jesus, but practical circumstances such as ill health or heavy and unavoidable family commitments mean they cannot get out and be part of what appear to be the more active and upfront aspects of Christian service. We pay lip service to the idea that there is no distinction between practical responsibilities and overly religious activity, but accepting this as a fact is not always easy. Thrill a minute testimony books don't help. When your major efforts are going into getting your aged mother on to a commode, or shopping for 6 or dealing with your own chronic ill health, accounts of someone's miracle-strewn walk with God can be depressing, to say the least.

My friend Phyllis is a good example. Phyllis, a faithful member of our church, celebrated her 89th birthday recently and has all sorts of ailments, including heart trouble and a hip that will have to be replaced before too long. Originally a member of the Bible study group that we belong to, she rarely goes out in the evening nowadays and is unable to be involved in most of the physical activities that were once part of her life. She loves and is greatly loved by her family, but I think the limitations of age and illness are burdensome to her.

I wish that Phyllis understood the importance of the role she plays in our lives and the lives of many others in our church. She is a prayer warrior of the old school. She intercedes daily, not just for Bridget and me in all the work that we undertake, but also for our four children, all of whom have left home now. The knowledge that folk like Phyllis are continually holding us up before God gives a real buoyancy to the little boat in which we face the storms of life. She is as much a part of the crew as if she was travelling with us on the journey. We thank God for her and for all those like her who take on the crucial task of support through prayer.

Well, just for people like Phyllis and for those who faithfully do what they can, when they can, here is a little bit of good news. Jesus tells us that if we support another Christian who is engaged in any kind of Christian ministry, it is as if we ourselves are engaged in that same activity.

“Anyone who receives you receives me, and anyone who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and anyone who receives a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. And if anyone gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, I tell you the truth, that person will certainly be rewarded. Mt 10: 40-42

Let us remind ourselves that Jesus always meant what he said. These are not word games. I repeat: anyone who upholds another person with prayer or hospitality or finance in his or her work for God will be regarded and rewarded as though they are doing the work of that person themselves. So help yourself to any job you want. You are greatly needed and you will be very highly valued by God himself and by those whom you bless with your service.’ Adrian Plass. BRF 2006

Let us pray:

Lord, we want to serve. Thank you that no matter what our circumstances, we can all have an equal role. Help us to believe and understand that in our service to others we are really putting ourselves on the front line of a spiritual battle. We thank you that you have given each of us special gifts to serve you, so forgive us when we start to doubt that we can be useful to you.

With give thanks for people like Phyllis, who have supported others through all the storms and sunshine of life, without expecting any reward or recognition. We know that you will personally thank them one day.

In Jesus’ name, Amen