

SERMON: Sunday – 1 August 2021 – Rev Alistair Cowper

For What Do We Work?

Ephesians 4:1-16

John 6:24-35

What are we to work for?

Is it for fame or fortune?

Is it to provide for family and loved ones?

What is this work that we are to do? The crowd ask Jesus.

What is this work that is given to people by the Son of Man?

When asked, Jesus gives a simple response.

It's to believe in the One God sent (29).

In other words, people are not to work for a particular reward but rather to aim at belief in the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Now to simply believe doesn't sound like work at all does it? And in a sense that's true because grace is about undeserved favour or benefit given free of charge.

But on the other hand faith needs to be worked at. It needs to be put to the test and proved able.

Someone once said that faith was spelled RISK implying that one needs to step out or take a risk in order to believe.

There needs to be a conscious exercise of the will, a determination to believe despite not yet being able to see the evidence for it, or even worse, to believe when all the evidence appears to point to the contrary.

The writer to the Hebrews describes faith like this;

“faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”

Or in another translation, "Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see." (11:1-2).

It takes effort, work, to decide to trust in goodness, in love, in a divine force which is for us and not against us and which aims at making all things well.

That's how I tried to feel when giving up a well paid teaching job to study full time for ministry in the church, knowing the risks involved for my family but somehow hoping that God would cause all things to work for good for all of us.

And I believe God has.

That's how I try to feel now, despite struggling with limited strength and energy, and some days feeling completely wiped out, there is the daily work of overcoming the temptation to give in and think things will never get any better.

And I believe God is at work through my weakness.

Jesus emphasised the need for people to work for food that endures rather than food that satisfies only until the next meal.

As the One who is the Bread of Life and Living Water then believing is about recognising that our lives are rooted in and centred around Christ.

So feeding on daily bread is a daily commitment to at least aim to resolve to live life the Jesus way.

What would Jesus do and how would Jesus do it?

Better than that though, the question should probably be. What is Christ, the Spirit of Jesus, doing in us and how is Christ doing it?

What are the things the Spirit is working in us?

Things that will last eternally not things that will pass.

Like what things?

Elsewhere, Paul uses the same verb to describe enduring eternally or remaining forever when he says that to the Corinthians that three things remain, faith, hope and love and the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Faith, hope and love are three things that will remain eternally. They are three aspects of that eternal life that Jesus bids us to work for in choosing him as the Bread of Life, with whom no one need ever be hungry nor thirsty.

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty (35).

According to Paul, love is the greatest thing to remain. And love needs to be worked at as well as faith.

But again let me remind myself that though this is work it is God who is working God's purposes out, moment by moment, by the Spirit.

Philippians 2:13:

for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Paul calls the Ephesian believers to be "fore-bearing with one another in love" (4:2).

Sometimes it's hard to bear with one another. What happens when there is a disagreement. It's not easy to disagree well but still bear one another. It needs to be done, as he says in the first part of that verse, with humility, meekness and long suffering (4:2).

Humility, meekness and long suffering might not be things that endure but they are character traits that are desperately needed if we are to bear one another in the love that will endure forever and get to that place of oneness that he speaks of....

That place of one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all.

That's where we're heading. That's where the Spirit is leading us. What it looks like in practice will be up to us to work it out as the Spirit leads us, as individuals but also as a people together in this place where we live and work.

What sort of people do we want to be?

What sort of church do we want to be?

How can we help work with the Spirit in leading everyone to have their hunger met with the Bread of Life and their thirst by the Living Water?

What sort of legacy do we want to leave to those who will come after us?

All of this is the ongoing daily work of faith which invites us moment by moment simply to believe.

O Gracious Lord,

You feed our hunger and satisfy our thirst

And invite us to put our whole lives in your hands.

Help us to do so

And to play our part
In the work of your kingdom.
In Jesus' name.
Amen.