

## **SERMON: Sunday – 15 August 2021 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **Offered so the world may live**

**Ephesians 5:15-20**

**John 6:51-58**

Jesus tells the crowd that he will offer his life so that the world may live.

In essence he is saying, I am the Living Bread, the Substance of Life, the One who freely came down from heaven, who freely gives life and pours out love.

Stephanie Spellers, has written a book called *The Church Cracked Open: Disruption, Decline, and New Hope for Beloved Community* (Church Publishing Incorporated: 2021). Here's a wee extract in which she talks about the Greek word *Kenosis* used in the Gospels to describe Jesus' pouring out of life and love.

“Jesus’s life on earth was a purely kenotic, downwardly mobile path. . . . Jesus could have been a prince on a throne, holding power, riches, and every kind of privilege. Instead, he denied it. He let it go. . . . He consciously chose a path that assured suffering, humiliation, desolation, and finally death on a cross. In response, God lifted him up and gave him glory.

None of this was an accident or coincidence. Jesus entered as he did, where he did, doing what he did, because God needed us to finally comprehend the truth: God is not a sky king who heads an empire; God is the love that gives itself away for the sake of more love.

When you take something you possess—your bread and power, your abilities and identities, your comfort and control, your treasured structures and even life itself—and release your attachment to it and make it useful to God’s movement, you are practicing kenosis.”

Love giving itself away for the sake of more love.

This is what we are invited to take part in. This flow of self giving love. And it’s what we naturally do as parents, grand parents, aunties, uncles, or simply as people committed to the common good.

Paul’s advice to the Ephesians in chapter 5 helps to put some meat on the bones of this, to give us an idea of what this new self giving life looks like.

According to Paul, followers of the downwardly mobile Jesus are called to live by the Spirit’s power. To live wisely. To find out what the Lord wants them to

do. To practise doing good. And to sing from the heart, always giving thanks as the Spirit breathes in and through them. To live with an attitude of gratitude.

The KJV puts Ephesians 5:15 as “see then that ye walk circumspectly”. In other words, think carefully before saying or doing anything.

How often we can be drawn into doing things without thinking carefully, prayerfully beforehand.

It's too easy to fire off a reply to an email or to respond with an angry word without having giving it proper attention, without listening to the Spirit's heartbeat.

The Spirit wants to fill us with life and make our existing life ever more fruitful with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, humility and self control.

Self control is needed when it comes to what we eat and drink as well as how we speak and act.

Don't get drunk on wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit (18).

We might agree that wine can be help at times but it can quickly take over if taken too often in excess. We might know too how it continues to ruin many a life. What might have began as a coping mechanism to dull the pain of trauma can easily become an addiction that threatens to engulf a person.

Instead be filled with the Holy Spirit. Sing psalms, hymns, spiritual songs. Make music to the Lord in your heart. Give thanks to God.

These are the tonics to help strengthen the soul and bring fruitful life.

And it's oh so important for the church to help to create opportunities for people to engage with the God who is the Source of Life.

I liked what the Church of Scotland Assembly Trustees wrote this week in their monthly update,

“the trustees were of the view that success as a church was not only measured by bringing people into a church building on a Sunday morning but by creating the right conditions for people to meet God and become part of the work of the Church in that way” (Assembly Trustees Update July 2021)

How can we help to create the conditions for us to meet God as well as for other people to meet God?

Where might we take what we are learning in the Spirit to bless other places and other people?

In what seems to be an increasingly secular society, there are no shortage of situations where a word of life can be spoken into. As long as we think and pray carefully before speaking.

O Lord,  
gentle God of whispers and Spirit power,  
fill us, move us, the Jesus way we pray.  
Amen.