

A Gospel People

SERVANT HEARTS

“We will serve those in the local community and beyond with integrity and love.”
How’s your heart?

In 1978 M. Scott Peck wrote a book that would become a massive bestseller. It became the most popular psychology book ever written. The book is: “The Road Less Travelled.” It begins with these three words: ‘Life is difficult!’ His main thesis is that the way to live well is to accept that life is difficult and to confront it head on! But...that is the road less travelled. Most people take the other option – the path of least resistance!

When it comes to having a servant heart which road do you choose, the road less travelled, or the path to least resistance? When it comes to having a servant heart this is something you can change. We may not be able to change our circumstances but we can change the attitude of our heart. When we choose the road less travelled we follow in the footsteps of the Master. Jesus said: “I have come not to be served but to serve.” (Mathew 20v28)

If you remember nothing else today, remember these three words: “and then some.” They are not original to me – I’ve borrowed them, but these three words seem to sum up our value of servant hearts. We’re going to read a story where this attitude “and then some” is wonderfully portrayed. This is a story of someone with a servant heart.

“Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the Lord had blessed him in every way. He said to the chief servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had, “Put your hand under my thigh. I want you to swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac.” The servant asked him, “What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I

then take your son back to the country you came from?" "Make sure that you do not take my son back there," Abraham said. "The Lord, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, "To your offspring I will give this land" – he will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there. If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine. Only do not take my son back there." So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore an oath to him concerning this matter. Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and left, taking with him all kinds of good things from his master. He set out of Aram Naharaim and made his way to the town of Nahor. He made the camels kneel down near the well outside the town; it was towards the evening, the time the women go out to draw water. Then he prayed, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too' – let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master." Before he had finished prayer, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, who was the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor. The girl was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever lain with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and come up again. The servant hurried to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water from your jar." "Drink, my Lord," she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink. After she had given him a drink, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have finished drinking." (Genesis 24:1 -19)

Abraham is an old man – his wife had died and the time has come for Isaac, his only son, to be married. The future of Israel rests on the future of Isaac – for as yet there is no nation and Isaac has no wife! On this future wife rest the shape of a nation, so Isaac needs a special kind of wife – and Abraham is very aware of it.

Question is – how does Abraham find a wife for Isaac? There were no dating agencies around at this time, and it was the custom that the parents would go

and find a wife: “here you go son – here’s the girl we found for you.” So Abraham, being old calls his servant (probably Eliezer) to look for a wife. They are both aware this is a big deal because it has to do with the promises of God to Abraham. So Eliezer sets out for Abraham’s homeland to find a wife. He takes with him a caravan of 10 camels laden with gifts which he would need to exchange for a wife! He arrives at Nahor and he gets his camels to kneel down. Then he prays – perhaps because he doesn’t know what else to do! He prays for a sign that he would know who should be Isaac’s wife. In those days hospitality was taken very seriously – it was often a matter of life and death, and certainly about character. And he waits. Then Rebekah turns up at the well. The text tells us that she was very beautiful – a loose translation might be she was a righteous babe! She gives Eliezer a drink – and then it happens. She offers to give the camels a drink until they have finished drinking!

How much water can a thirsty camel drink? Camels, of course, can go for days without drinking as I observed on my trek through the Sinai desert. A thirsty camel can drink up to 30 gallons of water. Eliezer has 10 camels – that equates to 300 gallons of water. Rebekah has offered to draw up to 300 gallons of water for Eliezer’s camels, that is a serious job!

Rebekah did everything that could be reasonably expected of her – and then some! It was the “and then some”, her servant heart, that made all the difference. Her servant heart, her “and then some” attitude changed her life – and it changed history. Rebekah went on to marry Isaac and she began a great adventure with the living God, and down successive generations her name has been remembered and celebrated.

Imagine the transformation that would happen in your work life; your home life; your relationships; your marriage; relationships with your parents or your children; with perhaps your physical health; in your mind and in your soul.... in the community if you served with an “and then some” attitude. And here’s the rub – you can do this – it is not out of your control. There are lots of things we cannot change, but this one we can.

We can make the choice to say – I will do everything that is reasonably expected – “and then some.”

Jesus talks about this kind of attitude in his sermon on the mount: “If someone forces you to go one mile, go two miles.” (Mathew 5 v 41) The background to this verse is that when Jesus lived the country was occupied by the Romans. Roman soldiers were a common sight and would often be forced to go on 50 mile marches. On these marches they had to carry heavy packs on their backs, but Roman law allowed them to draft in people to carry their burden, their pack for one mile. After one mile their legal obligation was over and they could give the pack back. As you can imagine this was not a popular practice. Jesus is saying you have to do the first mile because the law requires it, most people will resent it, but why don't you be different, and every now and again blow the mind of a Roman soldier by offering to carry his pack an extra mile! Let me serve you.

Jesus is not being legalistic – you have to do this every time, or saying we should tolerate abuse or injustice. We must exercise judgement and set appropriate boundaries. But he is saying if you want to live the values of the Kingdom - and have his heart – be a servant! “We will serve those in the local community and beyond with integrity and love.”

How much do you settle for just getting by in work, in your marriage, in your spiritual life, serving the community, in your prayer life? What would be the impact if we were the sort of people who did everything reasonably expected of us.... and then some? I am very aware that in this church there are many people who serve with an “and then some” attitude. I want to say thank you – it wouldn't happen without you. The paid staff here all do what is reasonably expected ... and then some... Thank you! But the truth is most of what happens in this church is done by volunteers, and it only works because you do what is reasonably expected – and then some.

Here's one example I bumped into this week. I arrived at just after 7am on Monday to write this talk. Brian Carmen was already here, so I went to say “Good Morning!” I went up to the hall to find the tables already set out for Holly – and to see the floor drying. By 7am he'd already washed the hall floor and set out the

tables – he was here at 6am. And he does that kind of thing every week – and then some! Thank you to every one of you who has a servant heart – you are a blessing to this community.

What happened to Rebekah as a result of what she did? Supposed we'd said to her: "look Rebekah – if you do this job, which will take you a few hours, you will go on the adventure of your life, you will meet the man of your dreams – wealthy, handsome, good character, you'll travel, you'll be the beginning of a whole nation, you'll be the mother of the Messiah, your name will be remembered and celebrated throughout human history – all of this if you do this job which will take you just a couple of hours..."

The point is Rebekah didn't have a clue what was going to happen because she gave some camels a drink. She went the second mile simply because she had a servant heart. Jesus said: "Give and it will be given to you." (Luke 6 v 38) This is simply the truth that the way to abundant living is through freely chosen servanthood. Servanthood that asks the question: "How can I delight and astound the people I'm serving?" Doing what is reasonably expected...and then some.

Here's the challenge – in three areas of life. First in work – which includes home, school, volunteering. I'm going to ask you to rate yourself as to how much you are an "and then some" person in this area of life. Rate yourself on a scale of 1-10 where:

10 = I do everything with all my strength; I have an appropriate level of commitment for my work, I am not a workaholic but I seek to be stretched and challenged ... and then some.

1 = I do just enough to get by my favourite phrase is: "that's not my job."

What one thing can you do tomorrow to be an "and then some" person?

The second area is in your relationships – friends/family. Would the people I am in relationship with say that I am an "and then some" person? Apparently being a

homemaker (and that's everyone who makes a home a home!) is rated as one of the toughest jobs out there! Rate yourself on a scale of 1 – 10 where:

10 = I am an “and then some” person in my relational life. I am a servant around the house; I do acts of service and I do them with a willing heart; I keep channels of communication open; I express affection in creative ways; I confront people when it would be easier not to; I challenge when it would be easier not to but I do it with a spirit of love.

1 = I just get by in my relationships; I generally choose the path of least resistance; I avoid confrontation; I rarely express my heart in creative ways.

What one step could you take to go the second mile – one act of service, one attitude change?

The third area: your relationship with God. Rate yourself on a scale 1 – 10 where:

10 = I diligently seek to know God better (you may already be a believer, or you may not be!)

1 = I just get by; I don't think about it very much; what's the least I have to do?

What one step could you take to becoming an “and then some” person?

The truth is God loves you.... and then some. He loves you because he loves you because he loves you... ‘He has given us every blessing in Christ.’ (Ephesians 1 v 3) We have an “and then some” God, and the best way to show others is to have his heart and to be servants. “We will serve those in the local community and beyond with integrity and love”, because we have an “and then some” God and we are “and then some” people.

Amen