**Called by God to Love and Serve.**

March 14, 2021. John 3:11-21, Ephesians 2:1-10

David Watson was an Anglican priest in the UK who died in the 1980’s at the age of 51. He wrote a few short, inspiring books which continue to be helpful resources in living as followers of Jesus. In his book “Discipleship” he writes about Covenant Love in these words, “The basis of covenant love is commitment…We commit ourselves to our brothers and sisters because we see Christ in them. We give ourselves to them in loving service...thinking first of their needs and interests rather than our ours…Real community will not function without covenant love”.[[1]](#footnote-1)

As we look today at what God calls us to, we do this on the basis of the relationship we share with God in Christ.

**We have a covenant relationship with God which is dependent on God’s grace**

In our gospel passage there was an illustration which points us to the sacrificial death of Jesus for us, but it also points further back to God’s faithful provision for the children of God in the time of Moses. It points to the covenant keeping God whom we serve.

Covenants feature strongly in the Hebrew Bible. We particularly associate covenants with Noah and Abraham. Covenants involve responsibilities and commitments between parties. God frequently commits to rescuing and providing for the Israelites, and they commit to following God.

In the illustration today the people who had been complaining about God, were dying from deadly snake bites. Moses was told to create a pole with a serpent attached, and that when the people looked to it they would be healed. So the people’s part in this covenant was simply to look to the pole, God’s part was to heal them. They were dependent on the grace of God to heal them.

In John’s gospel, we see the image from the time of Moses, being re-purposed, to point us to Jesus being “raised up” on the cross that all those who look to him may be saved.

We are positioned from the outset as followers of Christ, as completely dependant on the grace of God. Even before we respond to God, God is at work drawing us to God’s self. In the processes of sharing life with God we are completely dependent on the grace of God, nothing that we do earns favour in God’s sight, as our epistle reminded us it is by God’s grace that we are saved – the gift and sacrifice of Jesus alone makes our relationship with God possible.

**We are called to live out of this grace towards others.**

We are called to take this seriously, to recognise the cost involved and to commit ourselves to one another. The covenant service, which we will share in together, presses us to consider our commitment to God and to one another.

Our experience of the grace of God is a transformative experience. God’s grace acts to transform those attitudes and behaviours of which we would be ashamed. God’s grace brings light in darkness. God’s grace exposes our darkness and challenges us to deal with our “darkness”, to be open to scrutiny, to live with integrity so that we don’t need to fear scrutiny.

God’s great love for all humanity provokes the gift of Jesus to this world. Throughout Scripture, “God’s love for the world, though seldom explicit, is a given.”[[2]](#footnote-2) It forms the backdrop for all God does. In John’s gospel there is an emphasis on love being a choice, an active decision. God chooses to love us, and we are called to choose to love God and to love all humanity. The love of God has a serving heart. The image of Jesus lifted up on the cross, reminds readers of a similar description in Isaiah’s Suffering Servant passage.[[3]](#footnote-3) It reminds us that Jesus followed a path of sacrifice and servanthood rather than esteem and glory. As followers of Jesus we have this example before us, encouraging us to choose to love and serve others with vulnerability and integrity, and to choose to allow God to transform us that we may live in this way.

**We are called to be a part of something bigger than ourselves as individuals**

Finally we are called to be the people of God. We share in the grace of God with one another and we are called together to represent Christ in this world. We are called to be witnesses to what we have “heard and seen” what we have come to understand and experience. As we affirmed earlier in the reading we shared in together, we are called to be the body of Christ, the church in this community. We recognise our need for one another, we recognise and affirm the diverse gifts of one another, and how they can complement each other. We also recognise the responsibility that comes with these gifts of God, others in the community miss out if we are not using the gifts which God has given us.

1. David Watson, *Discipleship,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Press, 1981) 59 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . Micahel Ramsay, *The Gospel of John: The New International Commentary on the New Testament,* (Grand rapids, MI: Eerdmans publishing, 2010) 201 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Isaiah 52:13-53:12 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)