

I hope you are as excited as I am to be in church this week. We believe the local church is the hope of the world, and God is going to stir up His Church to do more than we ever thought possible. We're in part number two of a four-part message series called *Jesus and We*. (and yes, I know the grammar is wrong!) Last week, we acknowledged that we are faith-filled, big-thinking, risk takers. We will never insult God with small thinking or safe living.

Today we're looking at what happened after Jesus had this meeting with a woman who had come to draw water from the well. The disciples of Jesus were concerned about Jesus' state, wondering if He might be a little bit hungry. Isn't it funny how much we talk and think about food – particularly if you're giving up food for your fast! I have to be honest I'm craving crisps and on Friday it was chips... anyway John 4:32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." You can just imagine them looking at each other as they say v33 *Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"*

John4:34 is the important bit for us today: ³⁴ *"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.*

"My food, My nourishment, is something else. When everyone else thinks about, *Fill me, fill me, fill me*, what actually fills Me is to fill others. What nourishes Me is to pour into the lives of others, to do the work of God, and finish the task that He sent Me to do. I have a food you know nothing of. What fills Me is doing the work of God, and ministering to others."

What I find interesting is that the disciples were all concerned about consumption – "We need to consume. We've got to take care of ourselves. We've got to make sure He's okay. We need to eat something." In the heat of the desert making sure you have water and something to eat is very important and it's easy to recognize their actions as reasonable, however, Jesus was not concerned with consuming. He was concerned with contributing. When He contributed into the lives of others, that actually nourished Him in a way that is beyond our ability to understand. And that nature goes against our human nature, the core of who we are.

The reality is, in our world today, a lot of people say, "Well, we're just good people." That simply is not true. We're actually sinful people. We, by nature, are self-centered and selfish.

If you don't believe me, just ask yourself, do you ever have to teach a child to be selfish? Never, right? You never, ever sit down with a two-year-old and say, "Guess what? Today we're going to teach you how to be selfish. We're going to have selfish lessons. I'm going to hand you a toy, and what I'm going to do is, when I try to take it from you, I want you to scream, throw a fit, and go, at the top of your lungs, 'Mine!'" Do you ever have to teach a two-year-old to do that? No.

By nature, we are self-centered and selfish, in every single way. And Jesus is saying, "I have a higher calling than just thinking about Me. I want to contribute into the lives of others."

Today, the customer is king! A company will promote their quality, value, style, service, selection, convenience, savings, performance, experience, low rates, friendly service, name brands, easy terms, affordable prices, money-back guarantee, free installation, free admission, free appraisal, free alterations, free delivery, free estimates, free home trials, and free parking. No cash? No problem! No kidding. No fuss. No mess. No risk. No obligation. No red tape. No down payment. No entry fee. No hidden fees. No purchase necessary. No one will call on you. No payments until September. And don't forget to pick up your free gift: a classy, deluxe, custom designer, luxury, prestige, high-quality, premium, one-of-a-kind pencil holder – yours for the asking, no purchase necessary. Why? Because you are that important to us.”

And all of a sudden, we become a consumer-minded society – *It's all about me. It's all about what I want. It's all about me. It's all about what I want. I want to have it my way.*

It's even worked its way into the church – “I mean, we've looked everywhere. We've been to 17 churches in our community, and can't find one that meets our needs. We can't find a church that meets our needs.” And this is incredibly common in the consumeristic mindset today. It's bled all the way into the local Church. “We're looking for a church, but we just can't find one that meets our needs.”

I have to be careful here because we have benefitted from people who have moved church and I'm really glad that you have found a home with us.

Last week, we talked about being faith-filled, big-thinking, risk takers. This week I want to suggest that ***we need to be spiritual contributors, not spiritual consumers.*** Why? Because we understand that the Church does not exist for us, but we are the Church, and we exist for the world.

Like last week, I want you to imagine putting your mark on the scale of 1-10. If you are coming and going from here – enjoying the building, and the warmth and the people, but you never volunteer and you don't contribute financially then you're consuming much more than you're contributing and you'll be low on the scale.

On the other hand, you try to be present as much as possible and you volunteer in three or four different areas; you pray daily for God's work in the parish and you're tithing – you're going to be high on the scale.

A couple of years ago we did a survey and found that a huge percentage of those who attend regularly are actively involved in the life of the church.

So, put your mark on the scale. To be honest, if you marked yourself 6 or over you can pretty much go to sleep now because the rest of today is aimed at those who put 5 or less.

Why are we to be spiritual contributors? Because we understand that the Church does not exist for us. Who are we? We are the Church, and we exist for the world. We are spiritual contributors. Our food is something

many people don't understand. It is to do the work and the will of God, and that nourishes us, because the Church does not exist for us. But if you're a follower of Jesus, you need to recognize you are the Church, and you exist to bring the light and the love of Jesus into this world, together with all God's people in this area.

Over the next few years, as part of the Pathway of Renewal process, we're going to be working together to discern how we can best reach people in our community with the Gospel. There are likely to be changes in the way we do things but, more importantly, we will change. God calls all of his children to serve in his church. God calls us – it's not me, or the Session or anyone else. If you're a follower of Jesus, you are gifted, and called, and set apart to use your gifts to make a difference in His Church.

We've talked about this before and you know that the church is not the building. The Church is His people. We don't go to church, we are the Church. And we may use that language innocently – “I'm going to church” – that's totally fine, as long as we understand that the Church is not the building. We are the Church, and we're here for the world.

The church didn't have buildings until the Roman Emperor Constantine passed a law legalising Christianity in 313AD. Church buildings are useful, of course they are – the danger is when the building becomes more important than the people: I suspect that in our history in Scotland there have been lots of folk for whom 'going to church' was not about having a living, dynamic and personal faith in Christ but was about ritual and routine, and sometimes it was about status. Buildings can have a strange hold on people: in this congregation there are people who remember how strong feelings can be during a proposed union of congregations. Buildings have their place but they are not the church – people are the church.

Romans 12:6-8 6 In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. 7 If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. 8 If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

There are more gifts than these of course but let's think about these seven. You may be saying I'm not sure that I'm gifted at all but bear with me. Let's use an illustration – an apple pie. Imagine I'm at the table about to get stuck into my apple pie and you notice that it's right on the edge of the table but before you can speak it's in my lap. What do you do?

If you say, “Oh, my gosh, that's horrible. Here, let me help clean it up. I'll take care of that, just stay still,” and you go and immediately get to work, you have the gift of **servicing**.

If you say, “Oh, I can't believe that happened. Here, I want to buy you another one. And oh, let's have a whole round of apple pies for everyone at the table” – how many of you might be like that? You are **givers**.

Some of you would say, “Hey, don’t worry. We can get this organized in no time at all. You go get this, and you go get this. *Snap, snap, snap* – let’s get it done. You have the gift of **leadership**.

Someone else is going to go, “Yes, that was funny. It could happen to anybody, in fact, I did it the other day. In fact, I’ve got an apple pie – watch this – *ahhh!* – throw it in my lap, too!” You’re an **encourager**, and you love to make others feel better.

Those of you who would say, “Oh, I feel your pain and embarrassment. It’s dreadful when that happens.” You’ve got **kindness**, you’re empathetic.

Some of you would say, “You know what? There’s really a better way to eat apple pie. I’ve been researching this, and I’ve got a chart with seven steps to – In fact, in the Hebrew language, let me tell you – the actual Hebrew word that’s translated *apple pie* is *hakashamaka* – or whatever.” How many of you are kind of like that? You’ve got the gift of **teaching**.

And then, how many of you would say, “That’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever seen anybody do”? You don’t care what anybody thinks. You’ve got the gift of **prophecy**.

I can see all of these and more in people who are here this morning. It’s also unlikely that you only have the one gift but it may be that, if you think about it, you’ll be able to identify the thing that really makes you tick. The thing that excites you, that grabs your attention, that feeds your soul. Sometimes what we need is the opportunity to use and develop our gifts – and that comes by serving.

I just want to say this: For those of you that are Jesus followers, God has given you gifts, and He wants you to use them in the church. God wants every person to be active, making a difference, in the Church. There is something for every person to do. Therefore, if you are not doing anything in the Church, then there is something that God wants to be done that’s not being done. God wants His Church to be full of people that are not, *What about me?*

God calls you to serve in His Church. Thought number two: **God calls you to serve as His Church.**

Matthew 5:14-16 ¹⁴“*You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden.* ¹⁵*No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house.* ¹⁶*In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.*

Let your light shine into all the world, that they may see your good deeds, they may see that you’re committed to Christ, that they may see that you are different, that they may see that you care about people in the world, that they may see that you are engaged, loving them as they are, that they may see your good deeds.

Now, make no mistake about it, we are not saved by good works. We are saved by grace, through faith, and that alone. We are not saved by good works, but as followers of Jesus, we are saved to make a difference in this world. We are saved to be the light of the world.

Ask yourself, in the past seven days, how many people would know, by the way you lived, that you're different – that it's not all about you, that you are giving and serving, and making a difference, and listening, and truly being engaged in the lives of people that are not Jesus followers? Let them see your good works, so that they are intrigued, drawn in, and ask questions: "What's different about you? What makes you tick? Why do you care about me?"

I believe that the way we're doing things as a country is actually messed up. I believe that the government is not the best-equipped organization to meet the needs of the world today. The local Church is. The government kind of stepped in because the Church wasn't fulfilling its function. I believe that when the Church sees itself as God's calling to be spiritual contributors in this world, that people can look on and say, "I don't really understand what they believe, but they really believe it, and they really care."

I still have a vision for this congregation that is greater than what I see today.

- I have a vision of a Christian community that loves others more than we've been loved.
- I have a vision for people who serve others more than we have been served.
- I have a vision for a church that gives more than we have received.
- I have a vision for a group of people so overwhelmed with the love of God that we love and accept people right where they are, but we love and point them to a Jesus who will forgive, and heal, and make them new.
- I have a vision for a church where every single person in the body of Christ sees themselves as a part of the body of Christ, that no one just comes and only consumes, but they recognize, *We are His Church, and I've got gifts, and I've got a calling. And I cannot, after all God has done for me, simply be a consumer. There is something so much better. I have a food that many people don't understand. What fills me is to do the work of God to impact the lives of others.*
- I have a vision for a group of people that not only serve **in** the church, but serve **as** the Church, in the world, that if our congregation were not in the community, people would be upset because, "Where did it go? They were doing so much! They were making such a difference." And even if they don't believe in Jesus, they couldn't deny that He's impacted our lives, and what we believe is real.

We do believe God has called us to something more than a consumeristic, self-centered mindset. We are not spiritual consumers. We are spiritual contributors. Because the Church does not exist for us, you see. We are the Church, and we exist for the world.