

'A CULTURE OF HUMBLE SERVICE'

When was the last time you had a good hard look at yourself in the mirror?

Most of us at some stage during the day check our hair, make sure we haven't spilt food on ourselves, have a shave or check our make-up

But what about just stopping and really reflecting on what you see?

These days I definitely don't like spending too much time looking at myself in one of those small, magnified mirrors– I just see too much detail that I don't want to know about

The trick for me, is to take off my glasses– I look heaps better. But then I miss the hair that seems to spring up from all these new and unexpected places.

Paul Tripp says this:

"...we're all susceptible to having the definition of ourselves formed by carnival mirrors ...remember no mirror that you look into to know yourself will ever show you, you, with the clarity and accuracy of the mirror of God's word."

If we don't see ourselves accurately, if we avoid all the bumps and bruises, try to avoid our vulnerabilities, avoid recognising we don't have it all together and that, we're not perfect we'll miss our desperate need for God's grace. In other words: How can we offer grace, to each other, if we've not received it?

And so, Paul begins this next section, continuing to write to the numerous gatherings in people's homes, we know as the church in Rome.

Read Romans 12:3

As family of believers 2000 years later – as a church gathering here in Northbridge, I wonder if there is a more important sentence in the New Testament, for us to understand and then put into practice.

It seems to me; the message and the purpose of this sentence are the bricks and mortar - the solid foundation on which we stand as a family of believers.

Last week in verses 1 and 2, Paul urged us to offer ourselves in true and pleasing worship as our response, as children, of our merciful God. This morning/ evening - Paul moves to how we live that out in community.

And to do that Paul challenges us:

To: Have a good and honest look at ourselves. Paul would say: “To evaluate ourselves with sober judgement.”

To: Rejoice in the unique gifts God assigns us. They’re God’s and he gives them to us.

And thirdly to: Faithfully serve each other, humbly and intentionally as we use God’s gifts.

But, gracious church family life, starts, with how we see ourselves.

Read verse 3

I’m certain most of us, are familiar with reviews. For mums and dads with pre-schoolers, assessments start early these days and then there will be, school report cards, Parent teacher interviews, performance reviews, company reviews, strategy audits – I get a review, emailed to me every week that tells me (among other things): how many steps I’ve taken, how many hours I’ve slept and what my average resting pulse has been.

But do all these reviews and being careful to assess our performance provide the “sober judgement” Paul is talking about?

Seems to me the real challenge of evaluating with “sober judgement”, of having an honest and true view of myself, boils down to how I measure myself.

There are any number of ways I might do that:

- Through the eyes of my parents or family
- Through the lens of my hopes and dreams
- Through the comparisons I make with other people

But Paul provides a more accurate and reliable way there in ***verse 3- Read verse 3***

But what does that mean?

It could mean that God has allocated a different quantity or amount of faith and we’re to measure ourselves based on the unique allocation God gives us.

But that seems to be a contradiction: wouldn't receiving a bigger chunk of faith in comparison to someone else, only open-up the opportunity, to think too highly of ourselves?

And added to that as one commentator highlights:

It's difficult to think, given the context of Romans, and "faith", being the basic Christian response to the gospel, that God, would give this faith, in different quantities.

I think it's much more likely, as believers in Jesus, God has "distributed" to us an equal quantity of faith. It's, therefore, not the quantity, rather the substance, of our faith that becomes the benchmark, by which we measure ourselves.

So, what does this "faith", Paul has spent 11 chapters explaining, tell me, about me?

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

There is no one righteous not even one.

There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God and no one who does good not even one.

We're all equal in our need of forgiveness, we're all imperfect – But we're all equally forgiven sinners, when we believe in the risen Jesus.

As we find shelter, under the finished work of Jesus on the cross, God wins us back, and reconciles us, redeems us. And God doesn't discriminate, he "distributes" the same "measure" of faith, to everyone who believes.

It can be so tempting to think: "I'm not too bad, and maybe even tempted to think: "I'm just a little bit better than..."

I remember a few years ago, sitting on the grass around a fire in Yirrkala, an aboriginal community in Arnhem Land. It was a local church meeting, and we were asking for the communities blessing to start a team. To my great shame, when my dear sister an older aboriginal woman was asked a question, I assumed her answer would be very different, to the articulate and thoughtful answer she gave.

"...the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Romans 10:12-13)

How dare I, puff out my chest and think more highly of myself – when this “sober” truth is always before me.

We shouldn't also miss that our “faith” is “distributed” **verse 3**, and those different “gifts”, Paul details for us in verse 6-8, are “given”, **verse 6**.

They're God's, and he gives them to us. Instinctively, we know “gifts” are given, we give and receive them all the time on birthdays, Christmas and mostly I do on anniversaries.

But so often when we talk about someone as gifted or using their gifts, we take the attention away from the real “owner” and “giver” and that can easily become a source of pride.

But as Paul reminds his readers in Romans chapter 3:

“We are justified freely by God's grace”.

Where then is boasting? Paul asks. “It's excluded.” (Romans 3:27)

There is no reason, to get carried away with our own press, or place, for an over inflated, grandiose view of ourselves. Our gifts are not our own:

Read 12:6a

Maybe we smile, maybe we sing, maybe we pray a prayer of thankfulness or maybe we just pinch ourselves, and say out loud, in the words of Isaiah: ***“Lord ...all we've accomplished you've done for us.”***

Finally, we need to faithfully and humbly serve each other, using the gifts God provides.

As believers, we not only individually belong to Christ, but in Christ, we also belong to one of another, and need each other. God, in his grace, gives his people different gifts, so they can, lovingly, peacefully, graciously, and faithfully, live and function together.

It's why the body metaphor that Paul uses is so powerful. I can't think of anything, aside from the body, and how it functions, that is more interdependent, on each component part.

And Paul, in verses 6, 7 and 8, highlights, just a few, of the countless ways God's grace, does equip his children with the richness and diversity that makes up our Christian community.

For any of you, who are familiar with the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul use Rhetorical questions, to emphasise the need for diversity, here in Romans 12, he chooses repetition to reinforce, the importance of not allowing ourselves to be side-tracked, and to stay faithful to the gift assigned us.

"...if it's serving, then serve, teaching, then teach"

As one commentator so helpfully summarises – ***"Having gifts, let's use them"***

Everything we are, is something God has made us to be, and as we commune with one another, stopping even just for a millisecond, to remember God's mercy and his wonderful redeeming love, takes the focus off ourselves.

"Humility", as CS Lewis simply and profoundly explains," is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less."

Don't be fooled by appearances, we're all somewhere along a journey of God's transforming grace. Implicitly, what Paul is confirming, in verse 3, is "no one's perfect". He then goes onto affirm, all we have and all we are, come from God. And finally, he gives us a picture, to demonstrate, God has designed his family very intentionally, to need each other. To be compassionate, not critical, to receive his unmerited, unearned, undeserving grace. Why? So that we can offer it to each other when we gather as a church.

Paul says to me and to you, to all of us:

Read Romans 12:3-8