

Many of you will know that before I came to St Barnabas, I was the Minister of Ponsonby Baptist. This was for 11 years from the mid 1990's. The church had a very interesting mix of parishioners. Obviously, there were the upwardly mobile; people from the media, business and corporates, folk who lived in the area, a few retirees who had moved in before the prices went through the stratosphere (and that was back then), a lot of people and families who came to the church from other places, because they liked the style of worship and the vibe there, and then a number of people from the mental health community who lived in the flats and boarding houses around about. Probably not so many of them left now.

There was one guy there, a business man whose ability to think outside the square was very unusual. He came to me one day and said "Scott, I have an idea. In church we are always asking people for money, we have the collection, the special offerings for mission and helping others, and I wonder what would happen if we reversed the idea and gave away some money instead." As you can imagine I was a little bit perplexed because all I could see was a bill for some hundreds of dollars and the loss of the church offerings for the week, it wasn't a big place and we certainly weren't all that flush! And then he said to me, "Don't worry, I'll cover the cost of it."

So, what we did was get a whole bag of \$5 notes and filled all the offering baskets, and plates and when the time came for the offering, I announced that instead of having an offering we would be having a giving instead, and with that the plates were passed around, people were welcome to take a \$5 bill or 3 if they felt like it.

Well, at first, as the plates went about, no one took anything. Not one \$5 bill was uplifted. They passed by most congregational members unscathed.

That was until we came to the section of the congregation where the children were sitting, and they helped themselves, and they were second only to the group sitting right at the back of the church from the boarding houses, who also, with glee, took up the offer. After the baskets and offering plates had gone through those two groups ... we didn't get so many of the notes back.

The children and the folk from the mental health community were the only one's brave enough, humble enough, innocent enough to see the money for what it was, a generous gift offered in wholesome hospitality by the church and by extension ... by God.

Mark says, "Jesus is to be betrayed into human hands, and that they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." Mark says these things are inevitable. Inevitable because Jesus way, is the discipleship of equals, and the religious and political elites do not like the idea that their power and privilege in the world will be shared.

Mark says Jesus goes forward to this death as a ransom for many, in Mark, this is not a ransom in the sense of a debt being paid, but rather as an opportunity opened. An opportunity for exodus. An exodus from slavery.

Jesus in his dying provides us with this opportunity for exodus. Exodus from the slavery of all that would oppress us: from the ludicrous nature of religious laws, from rigid views about God and people, from attachments to power and wealth, honour and status. From the slavery of pride that would hinder us from taking such gifts from God.

An exodus from slavery. A deliverance from the bondages that hold us tight, the pride that stops us taking such gifts from God.

That bondage Jesus addresses when he says, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and the servant of all." The bondage Jesus sweeps aside when he says, "Whoever welcomes those with no power, whoever heeds the ones who have nothing, whoever embraces those of no account welcomes me, and the one who sent me."

This exodus from slavery and bondage is the gift offered to us all in baptism. This exodus is the promise of freedom. Freedom for all the little and big children of the world. All those not too proud to grab a \$5 note when it's passed around in church.

And this is the \$5 note handed out in every Christian service in the country this morning, and every morning. This generous gift offered in the highest reaches of hospitality by God. This gift of freedom. This opportunity of exodus from slavery and bondage.

It is offered every week ... whether for the first-time hearer ... or the person whose heard it all their lives whether in the midst of a L4 lockdown or the possibility of gathering with a 1000 for lunch after church.

Let's all have the courage to take this gift God offers us this morning ... to take it, grab it and work it for all it's worth.

Amen.

Thanks be to God.