

3. Worshipping transforms our ordinary actions

During the talk this week, we go deeper with a point that was introduced at the very start of this sermon series on worship – that everything we do can be offered as worship. In week 1, we looked at the first two verses of Romans 12, better expressed by the Message translation: *‘So, here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering.’* And we looked at some ways in which we could do that (summarised on a little card that I gave out) which included giving God the first greeting every morning; giving him the first thanks at every meal; the first call on our busy diaries; and making God the recipient of all our work. And it’s the last one of those suggestions that I’d like us to think more deeply about this week – how we make God the recipient of all our work. Or, what does it mean to worship God Monday to Saturday, wherever and whatever we might be doing at our particular stage in life.

In Romans, Paul says that he wants us *‘to worship God by offering our whole lives, all we have and all we are, as an offering of worship to God’*. And we worship because of who we are in Christ – *‘God’s holy people, chosen and dearly loved.’* As we gather together on a Sunday, we experience a deep reality of dwelling in Christ through the hymns we sing, the words we speak and our sharing of communion together. But then on Monday morning, our ordinary, everyday lives take over. The daily commute, the school run, the busyness of retirement (how *did* we find the time to work!), the school or college timetable. Looking after children, looking after elderly parents. Taking care of the house. An endless repetition of tasks. And then we gather again the following Sunday and get the chance to breathe, to invite God into the week, where a bit of us touches heaven.

If we’re not careful, there’s a temptation for us to see our lives on a Sunday, worshipping in Church, as very separate from our lives Monday through Saturday. But if we delight in our identity as *‘God’s holy people, chosen and dearly loved’*, our expressions of worship cannot just be about what we do in church on a Sunday. Our worship must spill out into whatever we do during the remaining 166 hours a week.

A few years ago, I came across a fabulous book by Mark Greene called *‘Thank God it’s Monday.’* That’s not a phrase you hear often. You more commonly hear *‘Thank God it’s Friday’* because the weekend is just a few hours away. But Mark Greene wrote this book to celebrate ministry in the workplace, acknowledging that during

most church services, there's little recognition of the time that each of us spends in work, or work-related activities.

At the time I read Mark's book, I was working full-time, studying for a work-related Master's Degree, raising two children and looking after the home. I would come home at the end of a 50 hour week and think 'I haven't done any ministry. I'm not serving God. I must make time outside of work to do all these things, otherwise I'm not much of a disciple am I.' So, on a Sunday I'd help with the children's work at church. Midweek, I'd lead a home group. I took on being the church safeguarding officer, using the knowledge and experience from my secular job. And the result was simply exhaustion and discouragement. Exhaustion because too much was being attempted. And discouragement because there was a sneaking suspicion that the thing I spent forty to fifty hours a week doing was of little intrinsic value to God. Because when had social workers ever been prayed for during the intercessions? When had I ever heard a sermon on work? When did anyone ever ask me what I did during the week, how my faith fitted into that and whether there was anything anyone could pray for? You can guess the answer.

But God doesn't change when we walk into work. The Holy Spirit doesn't suddenly realise he's in an office or a schoolroom or a laboratory and say, *'I'm off now. See you later at the prayer meeting.'* The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of mission, doesn't say, *'Well, here we are at work. Forget the evangelism bit, forget the discipleship bit, forget the gifts bit – I'm just into the fruits bit now. Let's concentrate on Galatians 5 – on love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – from 8 till 6, and we'll get back to drawing people back into a relationship with Christ later on this evening.'*

What we're called to do is to live integrated Christian lives, at work as well as outside work. Our reading from Colossians today contains these words: *'And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.'* Or from the Message: *'Let every detail in your lives – words, actions, whatever – be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.'*

Every word, every action. Surely that has to be in our workplace as well as outside it. About living in the confidence of God's resources at work – knowing yourself to be just as much chosen and dearly loved – at work as well as outside work. God's place is always first wherever we are, whatever we do, whoever we work for.

At the vision day in July, I shared a little book with you called *'The One About ... 8 stories about God in our everyday'* also by Mark Greene. It's a collection of true stories about people, with names changed, who God has been working in and through in their everyday Monday to Saturday lives. That's not to say that all these people were sharply aware of how God was working – often they weren't, until someone asked them about it, or simply pointed it out. My challenge at the Vision Day was whether members of this church could produce a similar collection of stories. But here's one from the book. It's called *'The one about ... Alan's half hour'*:

Alan can't for the life of him see why God still has him in this organisation. It's a chill place – this big bank - and he's been thinking of leaving for a while. He's been brought into a team that's being led by a much younger man who's destined for great things but who right now needs an older head to steady the ship. Alan is that older head. There are 130 in the team, their profitability is plummeting, and their employee engagement numbers are plummeting faster than their profitability. And apart from that, their technology belongs in a museum.

When he arrives his boss tells him, 'Your work space isn't quite ready, so let me take you round to where you'll be sitting for now and I'll introduce you to your No.2.'

'Great. I'd like to meet the other people there too.'

'Why? You'll never need to talk to them.'

'But they will be working for me.'

'But ... well, ok then,' his boss responds with a hint of tetchy frustration in his voice. 'I'll introduce you to your No.2 and he can introduce you to the others.'

What kind of culture is this? What kind of man is this? Alan wonders. And quickly discovers. He is immediately asked to restructure the whole team and ensure that he 'restructures' a particular person, Keith, out, for reasons unnamed. Alan wonders, 'What am I doing in a place like this? Where's God in this?' It's more like the court of Xerxes with Haman plotting the destruction of Mordecai and all his people. I wonder how you'd respond in a situation like that.

In the event, Alan tells his younger boss that he won't be restructuring the team quite yet – how can he do that before he knows what people can do? About a month into his new role, he offers everyone in his team half an hour of his time. They can, he tells them, talk about anything – career, family, hopes, ambition, God. Most of them, he discovers, aren't happy in their work – the leadership is poor, the

politicking rife, the appreciation non-existent, genuine interest or care for people absent ... Alan's 'half hour' opens the floodgates for genuine communication.

Alan, it turns out, has done this with every team he's led. He really cares about his people. He begins to tell me about a colleague in personal difficulty, on the cusp of divorce. 'Maybe that's why I'm here,' he says.

Through caring for people, Alan turned the team around. But shouldn't doing the best thing for any organisation, any business, include 'doing the loving thing', the thing that humanises, the thing that honours the other person as created in the image of God, the thing that seeks the best for them in the context they're in, tries to understand their talents, their hopes, their situation. Remembering Jesus' words that *'whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.'* And there are plenty of examples of such leaders in the Bible. Just have a read of the book of Ruth and see the way that Boaz leads his team and protects a newly arrived foreigner.

'But I'm not in work, Lynda', you might say. *'Been retired for years.'* But, you *will* have a frontline, a place in your ordinary week where you can make a difference. And you can pray for sensitivity to recognise God's promptings to reach out to someone in the day, and for courage and wisdom to act upon them, whether that be in the playground collecting children or grandchildren, in the Post Office queue, at the allotment, waiting to see the GP or shopping in the Co-op. Pray for an open heart and open hands to minister to those around you as opportunities arise and invite God to be with you in each situation, however ordinary. And, whatever you do, do it for the glory of God. Our whole lives becoming our offering of worship.

Amen.