

Useful for God

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Date: 11 October 2015

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[0 : 0 0] well before we look at God's word together let me lead you in prayer thank you so much dear God for giving us your word thank you that it's not designed to leave us unchanged but you want us to be shaped by it to understand it and to apply it and see how it changes everything so please help us today to be changed by it to be shaped by it for Christ's sake Amen Well thanks so much Andrew for your invitation here it's always a delight to come back to Holy Trinity it's in some ways a bit of a blast from the past I think of Peter Young up here leading prayers when I first came to Ridley which was 25 years ago Peter was a student there you may not even know that he's studied at Ridley but he's one of my earliest students at Ridley so it's great to have that continuity and a number of people I know here at Holy Trinity from various study tours that we've taken to Israel and to Greece and Turkey and many people you've sent to the college over the years and we give great thanks when we get students from Holy Trinity because we know that they're shaped solidly in God's word and they have good ministry orientation good understanding of the whole of scripture from years of faithful teaching so we're very delighted to have this partnership with Holy Trinity today one of the things that I've seen over the years is the importance of thinking about how we can be useful for God a lot of our students come to college and they're not really sure what kind of ministry they want to do but they want to be useful for God as I mix with various retirees now that I'm in my late 30s late, late, late 30s

I realise that sometimes we have to think through how are we going to use this next period of our life to be useful for God as I think of people who are starting out in their life young people perhaps not members of this congregation necessarily but others who say how can I make my life count for God and it's a great question to ask because I think that our life is so full of distractions these days so full of other things which can fill our lives I came across an interesting group the Roundabout Appreciation Society you may not have ever heard of it the Roundabout Appreciation Society the members spend their time discussing and appreciating local roundabouts here's what they write on their website roads are often condemned as being scars on the landscape but with the coming of the roundabout in all their glory they counteract the roads' unsightliness with infinite variety colour and creativeness these bitumen babes lift our sagging spirits on long tiresome trips the Roundabout is truly an oasis on a sea of tarmac unlike fascist robotic traffic lights where we are told when to stop and go the Roundabout allows us to show one another our very own English driving decorum never is a road system better suited to English consciousness than one that involves a set of rules and guidelines that harbors a carefully balanced system that relies on etiquette and protocol praise the bout it almost sounds religious in its language doesn't it?

now I hope I'm not treading on toes to say that I say that joining the Roundabout Appreciation Society is about the most useless thing I could imagine anyone doing for those of you who are Tasmanians I should say however that the 2015 award for the Roundabout of the Year was given to Hobart's Railway Roundabout if any of you know it but you see we can spend so much time looking at useless things doing things that really don't last and people whose main purpose in life is to promote the Roundabout Appreciation Society it seems to me have missed the riches of all that God wants for them to have God calls on us to be useful in our lives not useless not to waste our lives or to fritter them away on trivia my wife is Clarissa has just been through a couple of unrelated cancer treatments over the last five years and I think the biggest change that I've noticed in her in that time is that she now keeps a little mantra going she says

I must be sure that I don't waste my life it's brought home to her just the shortness of life and the importance of making sure that what she does in her life she's reasonably well at the moment what she does in her life counts for something furthers God's purposes and so many of the things that occupy so many people she just has no interest in anymore because you think that really is a waste of life it's not anything useful but in God's kingdom really that's useless at Ridley of course we train Christian ministers and a question that I constantly need to ask is what kind of local minister what kind of missionary what kind of student worker what kind of chaplain is useful to God but we all need to ask that question don't we from time to time you'll need to ask that at Doncaster here you'll say what kind of ministers should we have at Doncaster

I hope you don't have to say that for a little while and that Andrew will stay around but from time to time you will have to ask that as a really important question for you as a congregation but you will have to ask the question what kind of person should we set aside for ministry outside the parish what kind of person should we say come up to and tap on the shoulder and say have you ever thought about studying for full time Christian ministry have you ever thought about being a chaplain have you thought of using your gifts in the international context of going to Myanmar or Iran or some other country and working for the Lord over there what kind of person should we be looking at today and I think our passage today has something to help tell us about that about what kind of person is useful for God Paul is writing here to his protegee Timothy and he's urging him to be useful to God and he says at the very beginning of the passage keep on reminding

[7 : 44] God's people of these things because it's not only Timothy that needs to know it but all of us as God's people that we need to be reminded well the kind of things you had read for us in our second Bible reading in 2 Timothy page 1198 wouldn't be the first time you've heard so many of those ideas it starts off with the phrase keep on reminding them of these things Paul here is not teaching new things but having a ministry of reminder remember growing up after I'd started to go to church I didn't come up growing up in a Christian home but when I started to go to church I found that what people often said about churches I learned something new in church this day or they would say alternatively I didn't learn anything new in that sermon today and I wonder if we too often want to look for something new each week

I find that there are so many old things that I hear from scripture that I still haven't put into practice that I'm not ready to hear any more new things for a while because I want to put into practice the old things remember a minister once gave a sermon and then people were really challenged by it but the odd thing was the next week he gave the same sermon again and people wondered why on earth is he giving the same sermon and they thought oh well ministers have memory lapses maybe he hasn't realised that he's done it and then the third week he gave the same sermon again and they took him aside afterwards and said you know pastor this is the third week in a row you've given us the same sermon if something's wrong well he said look when you put this sermon into practice we'll move on to a new one and maybe that's what we need not necessarily the same sermon a few weeks in a row but to put into practice the things we already know it's not as if we need from a sermon a whole lot of new information or new insights when Paul writes to

Timothy he says keep on reminding God's people of these things one of the very helpful things of being a Christian minister is having a ministry of reminder of helping people to remember the things that they've learnt but either haven't remembered or haven't put into practice now what does he mean by remind God's people of these things what are these things are they the things he's just mentioned or the things that he's going to move on to well what's he just mentioned he's mentioned a number of things there back in verse 1 of the chapter he said be strong in the grace in Christ Jesus verse 2 he's talked about training up others to be reliable teachers of God's word in verses 3 to 7 he's talked about a number of images about being like a soldier identifying with Christ in suffering focus on him and don't get distracted by others like an athlete playing fair competing according to the rules like a farmer working hard and being rewarded good then in verses 8 to 13 he says remember

Jesus resurrected your life linked with him you've died with him you'll live with him our eternal destiny is tied up with him we will reign with him and now he says keep on reminding God's people of these things there's certainly good things to remind God's people of but I think it also includes the things that he's going to move on to say in this passage as well because I think he sets out there the kind of person that Timothy needs to be and in that light the kind of ministry that God's people the leaders of God's people need to have in ministry for verses 15 to 19 talk about being shaped by the word of how to study scripture and how to teach God's word he speaks in verse 15 of do your best to present yourself to God as one approved a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth what does it mean to correctly handle the word of truth in some of the other versions it's described as rightly dividing the word of truth and it means more literally to carve a straight path for the word as if you're a pioneer hacking a path through the jungle so that people can walk safely through and follow

John Stott uses the illustration of making a motorway or a freeway straight through the countryside instead of having to go through many roundabouts you see what the task of a teacher of God's word is to be faithful and clear and relevant to give people clarity to make things clear sometimes people think that the task of a Christian academic such as lecturers at Ridley is to make things so sound so highfalutin and complicated that it must be deep because I don't understand it let me assure you that if people really do understand it they should make things clear because the task of a real teacher of God's word whether it be in a local church or in a theological college is to take the complexities of God's word take the whole of God's word and to make it understandable for God's people because it's meant to be food that feeds

[13 : 47] God's people and so we need to work hard at being faithful and clear and relevant in our teaching and I'm sure you do have that here at Doncaster we certainly are meant to be faithful to the basics of faith we are meant to recite as we did the creed to remind us of those things that Christians have already believed but we must make sure that we don't make God's word so complex that people can't understand it so we make it simplistic but we give people a handle on God's word we help to put God's word in the context of all of scripture and we draw it out and use that as our authority rather than what we read in the newspaper this week you see faithful Bible preaching changes lives we can tell that for the years of faithful

Bible preaching in this church when we see students who come in from college for this church and compare it to others we see they've obviously been well taught in their faith they understand scripture they understand the big picture of what God is doing in his world because faithful Bible teaching changes people's lives and we see it reflected in the way they live as well so what's of vital importance to people being useful to God is a deep knowledge of the word of truth the scriptures we need to stay on the path and to avoid distractions we need to make it easy for other people to follow and for them to stay on the path as well one of the things I find at Ridley is that my job is a fairly sedentary one I'm often sitting in my office with books or computers in front of me and so one of the things

I try to do is to walk to work to and from work each day it's not terribly difficult in fact I have a lovely walk because I walk via the zoo and through a golf course it's quite a scenic walk and there are many examples of wildlife there once when I was walking across the level crossing down at Royal Park Station a fox came walking the other way and we just crossed paths and walked by each other usually it's not that quite that exciting but lots of lovely birds in the trees and I often find that as I'm walking on the path there I'm looking up at these birds and watching them and just seeing them interact and I find that I've actually walked off the path by the time there because I'm distracted by other things I need to watch where I'm walking and we need to have something like that to help us to watch where we're walking well that's what the scriptures do not walking home from work but walking through life as a metaphor for how we live our lives we need to make sure that we're not distracted by things that might seem interesting but are less important than getting where we're going do you notice that he's talking here about false teaching and that's the setting in which Paul is explaining to Timothy the importance of being useful for God

I think that's increasingly the setting in which Christians and Christian teachers find themselves today when there's false teaching both within the church and many outside the church who want to live in other ways than God allows and one of the things that Christian teachers have to do more and more now is to stand up for matters of truth in a sense we're moving into a post-Christian world and we need to at times stand on matters of principle but he's describing the false teaching here in two ways look at verse 16 he says this teaching is godless and in verse 17 in a very graphic imagery he says it's like gangren look at verse 16 avoid godless chatter because it will make you more and more ungodly those who indulge in it will become just like that more and more ungodly

I think what you can ask of any teaching in particular of error what does it teach about God and what kind of effect it has on people here their error was dangerous and this godless chatter is leading people away from God and his purposes for his world but it's also like gangren he says in verse 17 like blood poisoning to the body and sepsis to the wound and much as gangrene spreads and infects and kills other tissue so that a doctor who intervenes here must act decisively you can't just let gangrene go there and hope that it might go away you need to intervene and sometimes in a fairly major way to get rid of that gangrene out of your system false ideas about God can easily spread throughout the church and infect the body of believers there are many parts of

[19:17] God's people in the world where a prosperity theology reigns where people come to Christ thinking that it's going to improve their crops or improve their bank balance and many teachers try to attract people and their money through teaching prosperity theology it is a cancer it is like gangrene in churches particularly churches in the majority world this infection must be exposed and removed and what Paul says to Timothy in verse 19 is God's solid foundation stands firm what does he mean it's God's word that stands firm and he cites from it he gives two quotes the Lord knows those who are his and everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn from wickedness both quotes from the story the rebellion of Korah in the wilderness when Korah led rebellion against the authority of Moses and we see there that God knows those who are his but they need to turn from wrongdoing and they'll ask the question which side are you on are you on the side of God and his truth or are you interested in something else we've already had false teachers mentioned in this book of 2 Timothy

Hymenaeus mentioned even back in 1 Timothy chapter 1 but the discipline that was meted out to him was ineffective and so he's mentioned here again in verse 18 some who've departed from the faith from the truth they say the resurrection has taken place and they destroy the faith of some Hymenaeus and Philetus are cited as two of those examples you see our faith can easily be undermined by false teaching and we need to make sure that what we teach on the central truths of the gospel here the resurrection are not undermined by false teachers how can we identify false teaching by a thorough knowledge of scripture by a deep knowledge of how God's people have acted in the past by a rigorous study of theology by digging deeply into God's word using various languages in which it was written that's why we need to train people rigorously in theology and church history and languages and Bible at college because the answer to false teaching is a deep knowledge of the truths of God you can't get a read is digest version of theological education never intended that way we need to be deeply soaked in scripture deeply soaked in theology in order to be able to discern what is true and to discern error here

Hymenaeus and Philetus said the resurrection had happened that this life was as good as it gets what absolute folly and then he says in verses 20 and 21 he uses an illustration that's a little bit complex at first isn't it in a large house there are many articles not only of gold and silver but also of wood and clay some are for special purposes and some for common use those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes now it's in one sense a difficult image these vessels or containers or articles made out of various things are the teachers those carrying Christ as were and we may ask what's a special purpose and what's a common purpose but the point of it is made very clear isn't it the tail end of verse 21 the special purpose is to be made holy useful to the master and prepared to do any good work that's what

God wants us to be like God wants us as people God wants our character to be such that we are prepared for every good work God wants us to be worked on so that we're changed and shaped so that when we're in a situation we are already prepared prepared here by being made holy useful to the Lord and prepared to do any good work someone has defined character as who you are when no one's looking God and we need to at Ridley not just to shape people's thinking not just give them a deep knowledge of the scriptures though we do want to do that but we need to start work as you do here in the church on shaping people so that their character is one of godliness for we don't need ministers who are walking encyclopedias but living lives that don't honour god we don't need missionaries who can parrot off all the bible verses but in the way they treat people don't reflect god's values and standards we need people who are shaped in their character to be godlike christlike in nature so that when they speak god's word truly it will be mirrored in their lives and people will see not only will not only hear the words but will see the truth of those words lived out as they seek to be faithful lovers of god's word we need people who not only speak what's true but live what's right and so he moves on in verses 22 to 26 to talk about living a transformed life and you notice that there are negative and positive aspects of it look at verse 22 he says you can see the verbs that are being used there he says there are some things you are to flee from and some things you are to pursue you are to flee the evil desires of youth that's a negative aspect and you are to pursue righteousness faith love and peace so the question we've got to ask is what do we flee from what do we run after and Paul says run from spiritual danger those evil desires of youth run after what's spiritually good deny ourselves follow

Christ put off the old life put on the new as Paul says elsewhere run from some things run towards others that's what true Christian freedom is sometimes we think freedom is not having to do certain things but it's always freedom from certain things certain choices certain habits certain lifestyles but it's freedom for something else freedom for Christ like this freedom for God freedom to pursue peace and love and righteousness freedom from and freedom for shun certain things pursue other things avoid certain things follow what makes for godliness and Christ likeness and so here they're told to pursue righteousness faith love and peace along with all those who call on the lord out of a pure heart paul spoke back in verse 14 about quarreling about words and now he says steer clear of those arguments that just go round in circles don't have anything to do verse 23 with foolish and stupid arguments whenever i read that i think of our anglican synods but you may think of other contexts because you know they produce quarrels those foolish ignorant controversies as another version translates it's easy to get caught up into arguing about things that don't really count and really are going to get us nowhere it doesn't mean that you have a prohibition on all controversy some things are important to speak up about as i said after all paul contended for the gospel didn't he even with his fellow apostle peter he rebuked him and opposed him over circumcision and gospel freedom we see that in galatians chapter 2 paul didn't back off from a fight when the fight was needed in order to promote the gospel but he didn't want to just pursue endless questions and talk godless chatter just for the sake of it what a waste of time that's not being useful for god but being useless and what's foolish about what they're doing here is they're going beyond scripture into speculative and subjective ideas and sidelining what's really important pursuing things like righteousness faith love and peace paul also says it's important how we disagree with people so in verse 24 he says the lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone able to teach not resentful in order that god might grant repentance god might help people to see when they're in error and most people will be much more easily able to hear the hard words you're saying when you speak in a way that's gracious and tactful and humble you see again it's godliness of character isn't it that's what's important you can try to win an argument or you can try to win a person and god's not so much interested in us winning arguments against our non-christian friends but god is interested in us holding out the word of life to people inviting them to become friends of the living lord jesus and turning from their old ways to find life and hope and meaning but sometimes that happens by our godness of character and the way we conduct ourselves when we talk about christian things isn't it a scary thought

[30 : 35] that it'll be easier or harder for people to become christians depending on the way we talk to other people about the christian faith it's important how we commend christ and how we argue and how we talk and the goal is set out there i think in verses 25 and 26 that god will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth and they'll come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil who's taken them captive to do his will we don't want to win an argument we want to win a person well what can we see from this passage as we look back that might help us to find out what kind of ministers are useful to god and how we can be useful to god in our different forms of ministry certainly we see this that as unashamed workers we must be accurate and clear in our teaching and preaching whenever we commend the gospel what we say must be faithful to god's word and may be clear so that people can understand it and it must be relevant so that it hits people at their point of need so clear focus on the importance of commending the truth but as well as that as instruments of noble use we must be righteous in our character and conduct it's not just a matter of getting god's truth right because it can be dead right it's got to be echoed in the way we live and commend the gospel and so as the lord's servant we must be gentle and peacemaking in our manner that's what we should look for in a minister that's what we should look for as we seek to tap people on the shoulder and commend them to train for further christian ministry that's what we should pray for our ministers to become more and more and if there are things that drive you nuts about andrew or any of the other ministry team here let me suggest that they're good points for prayer you may find that as you pray about them that it may not be their problem at all but leaving that aside bring those things before god in prayer because that is what we ought to be praying that people who are set apart for ministry should be more and more useful for god and his purposes they're god's good gift to you pray that they may be faithful to the word they may teach it clearly and rightly pray that they might be gentle to the person pray they might be people of character even when no one's watching but that's obviously not just for ordained ministers it's not only ordained ministers who have to speak god's truth clearly it's not only for ordained ministers or people set apart from ministry who have to be people of godly character it's not only for ordained ministers who have to be people who commend the gospel it's something for all of us in our different ministry roles it might be in a bible study group or a small group here in the church it might be in our families it might be among our friends or neighbours it might be with young people or children it might be in your workplace or other involvement in the community that's what we should be like too faithful to the word gentle to the person and the question that we need to ask is if being useful to god is important to us and i hope it is then what changes do i need to make in order to be more useful for god what changes do i need to pray about for others that they might be more useful to god and how can we given the people who are here at doncaster how

can we set aside those for further ministry those who could be more useful for god in a wider role what we need to look for in ourselves and in others is a heart for god and his gospel and a heart for people and their needs let's pray so much to be sick and thank you for so very much to same and thank you for knowing how to proclaim what i cot in of r

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