

Monday 10am Service - God For All Ages - 31st January 2022

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Date: 31 January 2022

Preacher: Matt Wallace

[0 : 00] Hey everyone, it's Matt here. Sorry to not be with you this morning. Covid is still in our house and I figured you'd be better off without my company today. But it'd still be good to share a couple of thoughts as we begin this new week together.

Now, one of the encouraging things about our church life together here at St John's is that we've got a pretty good spread of ages among us. So if we take this Monday service, Sunday services and Sunday stars groups, whether we think about the drop-in, Little Friends, F&F; and so on, pretty much all ages are represented in our overall life as a church.

And when we look at the Bible, that range of involvement is, I guess, how it should be. For example, there are various stories where those on the senior end of the spectrum are key players.

So we read in verses like Exodus chapter 7 verse 7, we're told Moses was 80 years old and Aaron was 83 when they made their demands to Pharaoh.

Daniel was said to be at least 80 years old when he was sent into the lion's den. Sarah was 90 and Abraham was 99.

[1 : 23] Stick a flake in that one when God told them they would have a son they would call Isaac. The mind may boggle a bit at that one, but the Bible's reason for pointing out their ages seems to be that God's calling on our lives is relevant and real no matter what time of life it comes.

In the New Testament, along similar lines, we've got people like Zechariah and Elizabeth who are described as very old when they have their son, John, John the Baptist as we know him.

Or then when the infant Jesus is dedicated at the temple, there's Anna who was at least 84 years old when she praised God and declared important prophecies over Jesus.

Indeed, as it says about people in Psalm 42 verse 14, even in old age, they will still produce fruit. They will remain vital and green.

We may not, as the years go on, always feel vital and green, I suppose, but God's promise is that our age is irrelevant to our ability to bear God's good fruit in our lives.

[2 : 41] But then at the other end of the spectrum, being young is equally no barrier to being fruitful for God. So famously, there are ancient stories of boys like Samuel, who was called by God as a child to be a prophet, or David, a shepherd boy, who was given the task to fight Goliath and so set in motion a path which would see him become the greatest of all ancient kings of Israel.

But there's also one little story in Matthew's gospel which hints at how young many of Jesus' disciples were when he called them to be his most influential of followers.

It's from Matthew chapter 17. And we're told that when they were in the town of Capernaum, Peter was approached by the collectors of the temple tax.

And they asked if Jesus paid this yearly tax, which everyone in Israel had to pay in order to fund the upkeep of the temple in Jerusalem and its whole system, hence why it's called the temple tax.

Now, it was a deeply unpopular tax because, as Jesus later implies, it goes against any idea of our giving to God being cheerfully offered rather than demanded of us.

[3 : 59] And from what we know of Jesus, it's unlikely he was keen on people being forced to uphold a temple system, which often seemed to be most concerned with keeping the rich leaders in place.

Now, it seems that in order to choose his battles perhaps at this point, Jesus agrees to pay it. So Jesus says to Peter, Go down to the lake and throw in a line.

Open the mouth of the first fish you catch and you'll find a large silver coin. Take it and pay the tax for both of us. Now, leaving aside the pretty strange way this coin would be found, what's interesting for us today is that Jesus says that this coin will pay the temple tax for both of us, for Jesus and Peter.

But what about the temple tax for all the other disciples, though? Well, we know from the book of Exodus that every Jewish male was obliged to pay this temple tax, but only for those men aged 20 or over.

Therefore, both Jesus and Peter were at least 20 at this point. But since Jesus doesn't arrange for the tax to be paid by all the other disciples, it implies that they were all under 20 and not required to pay this tax.

[5 : 32] Now, if Peter is the oldest disciple, well, that kind of makes sense as he was seen as a leader among them. And we know from elsewhere in the Gospels that Peter was married because he had a mother-in-law.

But for the other disciples, if they are indeed under 20, if they're teenagers, well, that again makes sense because we see some of them working for dad still, some of them have a pushy mum who's on the scene, and we hear nothing about whether the rest of them are married or have children.

But more importantly, I think this means that we can picture the disciples of Jesus that's more like a youth group, young enough to leave everything behind to follow Jesus, young enough to be able to go on for many years and help establish the early church from which we owe our faith today.

Indeed, in all of this, it seems to me that whether it's pensioners who prophesy or teenagers who testify, God calls all ages, each of us, whatever stage of life we're at, to continue to bear good fruit for him in the way we faithfully follow that lifelong call.

And so this week, whether we're young, old or somewhere in the middle, let's be expectant of the ways God will call us to share his love with those we live alongside.

[7 : 04] Amen.