

# God's Reward For Those Who Seek Him

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[ 0 : 00 ] My family, seeing us through the recent crisis of my surgery, we felt very much surrounded by the love, care, and affection and support, which I could never have asked for and could never repay.

So I suppose a new chapter in my life at St. John's Begins. When I first came, I was a bit chippy and thought, well, they don't owe me anything and I don't owe them anything, so we'll see what happens.

But now I have to confess that I owe you a great deal for the kind of love and care and support that you've been to all of us. I might say that going into this kind of modern miracle surgery, I thought I would come out something like the six million dollar man.

But having been in and been through the process, I got a bill for \$55, so I presume that. That's all I'm up to so far.

The parish life of St. John's has gone on and the parish has grown and it's a delight to come back and sit in the congregation and see what's happening and observe, as it were, from the outside for a few weeks.

[ 1 : 22 ] And I'm very grateful for lots of things. For the nursery downstairs and for Kloss and his wife, now resident in the caretaker suite, which we've talked about for a long time, but now it's there.

For the sign which is up in front of the church and the confirmation classes that are going to be presented to the bishop shortly and the continuing prosperity of the Monday Church Club and the apparent success of the Lenten Bible studies and the Sunday morning children's program, which I think is very worthwhile.

And the choir, which has done nobly, and I just am very grateful to all of them. And I'm grateful, too, for the vestry meeting that's coming up in a week's time, which is going to be something of a test run for the stewardship program that we've been launched on as a parish, in which we are really seeking that people will take serious responsibility as disciples of Jesus Christ in the offering of their time and their talents and their money for the work of Christ's church.

So that's an important meeting and an important time in the life of the parents. But St. John continues to have needs as well. We have needs because the maintenance of our petty personal kingdoms keep us from one another.

You see that going on. The unwillingness to admit our personal needs and longings keep us from one another, and it's hard to make that kind of open confession to one another.

[ 3 : 10 ] The resentments and hostility and anger and hurts we are all burdened with keep us from one another as well. The way we sit in church often indicates our sense of separateness and our sense sometimes of alienation from one another.

And that's hard to overcome. You know that in the communion service there is a time for the passing of the peace, when we're to turn to one another and take the other person by the hand and say, The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And we at St. John's don't do that for reasons that we all understand. Actually, the biggest reason from my mind is that Dr. Packer doesn't approve of it.

And when Dr. Packer doesn't approve of it, then I'm frightened to go ahead. He thinks it should be reserved for the coffee hour.

And so for the moment we have done that. But there is reason for us, I think, to come to know each other better and to be more closely related to one another.

[ 4 : 22 ] We have the problem of trying to encourage young people to come and take part in the worship of the church without offending older members. And how do we encourage new members

to join the parish without the older members being threatened?

Those are everyday problems in the life of a congregation like this. How do you approach an old traditional Anglican with a lifetime of church loyalty and say to him, There's even more to your faith than you've yet discovered.

That's hard work too. And yet it's something which the gospel demands of us that we do that. And if you, like me, are an old traditional Anglican, you find it difficult.

How do you approach a businessman who spends his time and his energy in a world where God does not apparently exist, except as a convenient expression of profanity, where theology is reduced to God helps them what helps themselves, and you go in and tell him about the other kingdom, the kingdom of God?

How do we generate in people's hearts a faith that is bigger than the fear of cancer? And that's a practical pastoral problem day by day and week by week, that that kind of life-giving faith should be available to us and we should be able to share it one with another.

[ 5 : 56 ] How do you tell a wealthy, successful, healthy generation living as the West Coasters do on the pinnacle of prosperity that God's blessedness belongs to the poor in spirit?

How do you tell mourners who come to pay their respects to an old friend that the power of death has been decisively and finally broken by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead?

And they are meant to gather in hope and thanksgiving and with a joy that is bigger than their sense of bereavement. And how do you tell the proud parents of a lovely child that when they come to baptism they are covenanting to train their child as a disciple of Jesus Christ to live in a world where Christ is neither known nor acknowledged?

That's a hard thing to do and it's hard to get that message across. Or how do you tell a young couple coming to be married that they're going to need a lot of help and that it's available but they've got to ask for it.

Well, the one verse that I want to put in front of you as being decisive in all these matters and I think decisive for us as a congregation is the verse that comes from the great chapter on faith in Hebrews which says whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those that seek him.

[ 7 : 49 ] And I very often in conversation with people whose loyalty to the church and whose background within the family of the church has not saved them as it were from the reality in their minds and hearts of their working everyday life that they don't believe in God that they're not sure that he exists and that they are not tempted to draw near to him simply because they in fact do not believe.

And that fact of unbelief is one of the sober and yet real facts of our world. And you don't have to talk seriously to people to discover that faith in God is not in any sense automatic.

The man or woman who draws near to God draws near presumably to worship him. And if our worship which is so central to our life as a congregation is to be all that it's meant to be then we have to take this verse seriously.

Whoever whichever one of us you or me is to draw near to worship God we must meet the condition of believing of having come to believe that he exists and that he rewards those who diligently seek him.

We must in the first instance then believe that he exists. Most of us perhaps have read the literature of a time in history when it was impossible not to believe in the existence of God but if you read contemporary literature you will soon discover that we live in a world where it is assumed that a reasonable person would not believe in God except possibly as a private fantasy which a liberal world will allow him.

[ 9 : 54 ] But that belief in the existence of God is not one of the strong reality which we encounter in people from day to day.

There are those who have come to believe in God through such wonders as the third law of thermodynamics or in some other way have been convinced in their mind of his existence.

But most of us by a kind of living in a sort of technological and computer age never seriously look at the question.

And the lovely story of Pascal and his sort of great wager on the fact that God exists and saying that he can tell by talking to a person what that person is betting on what they're really putting their money on as far as their life is concerned.

And you don't have to talk to people for very long before you can see what it is they are betting on. Betting on that there is no meaning to life apart from the few years of health and prosperity which you might enjoy.

[ 11 : 09 ] But there is no transcendent or eternal meaning to life. He that draws near to God must believe that God exists and must be prepared to bet his life on it.

The second thing that you have to do is you have to diligently seek him. And that's like when a plane goes down somewhere in the bushlands of British Columbia and how search and rescue goes to work with a grid map and carefully tries to examine every square foot of the wild and mountainous terrain to try and pick up something as tiny as a small plane that's gone down. And they search hour after hour and day after day in order to try and find it. And that's what this verse says. The first condition is to believe that God exists and then to diligently seek him to look for him and to look for him carefully in order that you might find him.

And that search is the search that we are to be on as a congregation and as a church. We've got to find God in our stewardship.

We've got to find God in our worship. We've got to find God in our communion. We've got to find God in our relationship to one another. We've got to find God in our relationship to the peculiar prosperity into which we have been born and in which we live our lives.

[ 12 : 50 ] It's terribly important that in the midst we diligently seek for God. I'd like to tell you a little parable that we acted out this week.

I came home from Main Island last Saturday and opened an envelope in which there was a check, a very important check. But it's Saturday and you can't do anything with a check on Saturday so I left it on the table.

And on Sunday I wouldn't touch such things so I left it on the table again. And on Monday morning I meant to pick it up but it wasn't where I thought it was so I presumed I'd left it somewhere else and so I forgot about it and got over to the office and decided well it's not here so I must have left it at home.

And then when I got home I said well it's not here so I probably left it at the office and so the whole of Monday went by and I never saw it. And Tuesday morning dawned and I said well it's probably in my briefcase and I haven't had a chance to go through that and then I thought well maybe one of the children picked it up or maybe Fran knows where it is and we simply didn't know where it was. And when Tuesday night came around and it still hadn't appeared then I pushed the panic button and we finally had to diligently seek for that which before we thought would just turn up.

[ 14 : 13 ] And a lot of people I guess lived their lives thinking that somewhere along the line God will just turn up and that they will never have to go and look for him.

Well as it was and this is the parable, Fran and I put on our overcoats and came over through the rain to find two great big garbage bags outside the back door of the church.

Don't tell anybody but we had a secret garbage disposal system going during the past few months which involved leaving it at the back of the church.

And these weren't just normal little garbage bags, these were great big garbage bags like this. And so we went carefully through the garbage bit by bit. I don't know if you've ever done that.

It's not a very pleasant task. And made a terrible mess and were greeted with no success until we got to the bottom of the second bag and there it was.

[ 15 : 16 ] So you can't imagine how much joy we got out of having gone through the garbage and diligently seeking for it and we found it.

The parable is that if you will go to church and work your way through all the garbage, you'll find something that's infinitely worthwhile.

And that's how life works in fact. And a lot of people spend their time thinking that they know where God is and that he's available if they should happen to need him, but they have never made it their business to diligently seek him.

And our business as a congregation is to seek him, that we may find him. And we're confronted all the time with situations where with young people in distress, with the burdens and anxieties that hang on our own hearts, in our lives and in our families and in our life together together as a congregation.

We really need not any human answers because most of us have those available to us, every possible human answer. But those answers aren't big enough for the kind of issues that confront us

in our world.

[16:41] And we have to find God himself, not to know about him, but to know him, and to know him as he has chosen to make himself known to us in Christ.

And that's what we're involved in as a congregation and as a parish. And it's a very exciting search to be involved in. As we join with one another, as we share one another's burdens, as we have fellowship one with another, as we set ourselves the responsibility of diligently seeking him. And it says he is the rewarder. He is the one who pays off. That God rewards our seeking of him by making himself known to us.

And I think that's our responsibility as we are involved in this service of worship this morning. We may diligently seek him, that he will reward us by making himself known to us in our worship and in our prayer and in our fellowship together.

Can we pray? Our God and Father, we are brought together in the family of this congregation.

[18:16] we acknowledge all the things that we're not that we're supposed to be and all the things we long to see and how we long to see people brought to a wonderful faith and trust in you, how we long to see people trained to be disciples of Jesus Christ, how we long to see people find victory in their personal lives, how we long to see the sick healed, how we long to see the hope and joy in people's lives that belong to us in Christ.

Our God, give us an urgent desire to diligently seek you in all these circumstances, that you may reward us as it is your heart's desire to do, imparting the gift of yourself to us in the person of Jesus Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Give us that longing, take away any satisfaction which we may have apart from the satisfaction which you give. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.