

Serving with Joy
Mark 10:42–45; Philippians 2:1–11

Rev Dr Deo Vistar
St Augustine's Anglican Church
Unley, South Australia

Sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
6 September 2026

Over the past few weeks we have considered what it means to live faithfully as followers of Jesus.

We began with “Faith that Endures” – the call to remain faithful to Christ even when the Christian life is difficult, when circumstances are challenging, and when we cannot see clearly what God is doing.

Then we considered “Stewards of God’s Grace” – the truth that everything we have is ultimately God’s gift to us. Our time, our abilities, our possessions, our opportunities, our relationships, our church – all of these are gifts entrusted to us by God. And therefore, faithful living means asking, “How does God want me to use what he has entrusted to me?”

Today we come to the theme “Serving with Joy.”

I think it is a fitting conclusion to this series because if we have faith that endures, and if we understand ourselves as stewards of God’s grace, then the natural response is to offer ourselves in service to God and to others.

But there is something important about the way we serve. We are called not simply to serve, but to serve with joy.

One of the truths the Bible teaches us is that the Christian life is a life of service. If you are a follower of Christ, your mentality, your posture and your desire should be to ask, “How can I serve?” rather than, “How can others serve me?”

If you see something that needs to be done – whether in your home, in the church, in your workplace or somewhere else – the Christian response should be a willingness to step forward and help.

A few weeks ago, there was a pile of dry leaves at the back of the church, so I decided to sweep them up, gather them together and put them in the bin. One of the Aggies volunteers who saw me doing this said to me, “That’s not in your job description, is it?” I said, “It’s not in the written job description, but it is in the unwritten job description.”

What I meant was that we shouldn’t be legalistic about service that we say, “That’s not my responsibility. That’s not my job. Someone else should do it.” If something needs doing, and we are able to do it, then why not do it? That’s part of what it means to have the heart of a servant.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus says something remarkable: “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant” (Mark 10:43). And Jesus gives us the reason: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (v. 45).

When Jesus came into the world, he did not come demanding to be served. He came to serve us. And he performed the supreme act of service: he gave his life for our sakes, for our salvation. Why? Because he loves us, because he does not want us to perish.

That is Jesus.

And if that is how Jesus behaved, what about us who claim to be his followers?

The ethic of the fallen world is very different. It is an ethic of pride and self-interest. “What can I get? What do I deserve? Who is going to serve me? How can I get what I want?”

And we see the consequences of that selfishness everywhere – in individuals, in families, in organisations and even among nations.

Jesus offers us a completely different way. He says that greatness is found not in being served but in serving.

In Philippians 2, Paul describes in a different way what Jesus says in Mark 10. Paul tells us that Christ, although he was “in very nature God,” humbled himself. He took the form of a servant and became obedient, even to death on a cross.

Friends, this is the heart of the gospel.

Before we ever serve Christ, Christ serves us. Before we give ourselves to him, he gives himself for us. Before we love him, he loves us. This is where Christian service begins.

Christian service, therefore, is a response of gratitude to grace.

But we also need to recognise that Christian service is not always easy or enjoyable. Philippians 2 does not present Jesus’ servanthood as something comfortable or convenient. His service led him to the cross. He suffered. He died.

So when we talk about serving with joy, we do not mean that everything we do for God will always be pleasant. Service involves sacrifice. It involves inconvenience. It involves doing things that nobody notices. Sometimes it means persevering when we are tired. Sometimes it means doing something simply because it needs to be done.

And yet, Christian service can still be characterised by joy, because our joy does not ultimately come from the task. Our joy comes from Christ.

Paul’s letter to the Philippians is often described as his “letter of joy.”

Joy is not the only theme in the letter. Paul also talks about Christ, the gospel, Christian fellowship, suffering, humility, unity and perseverance. But the language of joy and rejoicing runs through all four chapters.

And what makes this letter especially remarkable is where Paul is when he writes it.

He is in prison. He had been arrested, not because he had committed a crime, but because he has been preaching Christ.

And yet, again and again, Paul speaks about joy. In chapter 1 he says, “I rejoice... and I will continue to rejoice.”

In chapter 2 he says, “I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.”

And in chapter 3, he exhorts the believers to “rejoice in the Lord!”

And then perhaps the most famous verse in the letter is in chapter 4: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

There is something deeply counterintuitive about this. If you are suffering, if you are facing hardship and adversity, the last thing we might expect is to hear you talking about joy. We might expect complaining. We might expect discouragement. We might expect someone to ask, “Why is God allowing this to happen to me?”

But Paul speaks about joy. Why? Because Paul’s joy is not ultimately determined by his circumstances. It is rooted in the Lord.

There is something else about Paul’s letter that I find encouraging. Paul is suffering, but he doesn’t write to the Philippians asking them to encourage him. Instead, he encourages them.

The person who is suffering becomes a source of encouragement to those who are not suffering in quite the same way. And this teaches us something important.

So long as the grace of God has come upon you and his love has touched your life, even in the midst of difficulty, you can still encourage those around you. You can still serve, you can still give, and you can still bless others.

And sometimes, remarkably, in serving others, we discover joy ourselves. So many times in my life as a pastor, I have experienced this. At the end of a very busy Sunday at church, I might go home physically exhausted, yet with my heart full of joy.

There is an interesting paradox about joy. Often the people who have the deepest joy are not the people who spend their lives asking, “How can I make myself happy?” They are the people who spend their lives giving themselves to others.

Think about the people you know who are always willing to help – people who volunteer, who visit someone who is lonely, who quietly look after others, who give their time without expecting anything in return. Often these are also the people who have a deep sense of contentment and joy.

So as we bring this series on Faithful Living to a close, let us remember the three things we have considered.

Remain faithful to Christ, even when life is difficult.

Recognise that everything we have is a gift entrusted to us by God.

And offer yourself to God and to others, following the example of Christ who came not to be served, but to serve.

Wherever God has placed, whatever gifts he has entrusted to us, and whatever service he calls us to undertake, let us serve the Lord with joy.

As Psalm 100 says, “Serve the Lord with gladness.” Not because every task will be easy, not because everyone will notice. But because Christ has first loved us, Christ has first served us, and Christ is worthy of our joyful service.

Amen.