

Coach House Church **BEACONS**

S M A L L T H I N G S

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It's the start of a new school year- although a little strange this year. Most Septembers throughout my life have had September as a new beginning-whether it was when I was a student or for the last 30 or so years as a teacher. Every year, there are tell-tale signs that make the beginning of the school year different from the rest of the year: new uniforms, new shoes, new bags and lunch boxes for the students; classrooms with new books, new pencils all sharp and ready for action; daddy-long-legs appearing inside and a chilly morning where you don't want to leap out of bed. Most of all there are those great intentions to be more organised and to keep on top of everything, to plan well ahead of time and to make every lesson count.

Yet, with the new year's expectations also comes moments of almost self -doubt. Am I good enough to do this? Can I be effective enough so that every student makes progress and reach their potential? My experience is that you never feel that the job is completed, you never get to the end of the to-do list. You are always adapting and modifying to meet the needs of the students - no two years are ever the same., especially this one!

I know this feeling must be the same for lots of people whether they are at work or home or beginning a new chapter in retirement and there are times when you wonder - Am I making a difference? Is this the best I can do? We can feel capable of only doing the small mundane things in life, and not the great, life-changing acts that will impact on others.

But this thought process is wrong. The bible has lots to say about the difference that small acts can make, about the importance of small, seemingly insignificant events, and more importantly, how important we are as individuals in the eyes of God.

In Matthew 14 crowds of people are listening to Jesus and as time goes on the disciples urge Jesus to send them away to go and get food as everyone is getting hungry. Jesus, however, tells the disciples to feed them. Their response is I suspect, no different than anything we would say in verse 17: "But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish!" they answered.

Yet, most will know what happened next and how miraculously 5000 men, plus women and children were fed, and there were leftovers! John chapter 6 tells us that a young boy provided the initial packed lunch. What if he had said – 'What difference will this packed lunch make?' As a result of his contribution, his actions are recorded for all time. What a story to tell everyone he knew.

Hebrews 13 reminds us: 2 Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!

Simple actions, being kind, friendly, lending a listening ear, having a coffee together – often have a big effect. We should never underestimate the power of hospitality and friendship. In recent months we have witnessed the effect of these privileges being removed from us and the effect of isolation on many people.

The bible also warns that small things can be used for good or bad. In James 3 it says: 3 We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. 4 And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. 5 In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches.

It goes on to say that the tongue can be used for blessing or cursing and, used wrongly, can be like a spark igniting a devastating fire. We have a responsibility to make the right choices and we have to rely on God's strength to do the right thing.

In Philippians chapter 4 Paul recognises his own successes are only the result of God's power in his life and he says:

13 For I can do everything through Christ, [d] who gives me strength.

In the Old Testament, the prophet Elijah meets a widow who is picking up sticks so she can build a fire to cook her last portion of flour, the last meal she will be able to make for her and her son. Despite her desperate circumstance, she shares her last meal with Elijah. It was a simple act with potentially fatal consequences. Yet, the result was quite the reverse as through her self-less action, she was repaid through God's power and the oil and flour did not run out until the rains returned and allowed her to grow more crops.

In another instance, a widow who was being chased by creditors, threatening to take her sons as slaves, pleaded with the prophet Elisha for help. She had just a small jar of olive oil left over. As a result of her plea, in effect asking for God's help through the prophet, her prayers were answered. She kept pouring and pouring and pouring until there was enough oil to sell and pay off her debts. This story tells me how important it is to ask for help, to call out to God in times of concern and distress because he is always listening out for us. The small act of asking for help sometimes feels a big event for us but it is what God expects from us. Luke 18 tells us that nothing is impossible with God, so we will never surprise him or exhaust his resources for us.

When Jesus spoke to his disciples he had to remind them not to be fearful of those who were criticising, persecuting or even plotting their demise. Jesus told them only to fear God who has control over their destiny and in Luke 12 he says: 6 "What is the price of five sparrows—two copper coins[b]? Yet God does not forget a single one of them. 7 And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows. The apostle Paul, who we recognise as being so effective in spreading Jesus message, did not elevate himself or his own importance, yet he understood how important he was in God's eyes. Jesus sacrifice, death and resurrection meant that he could have a direct relationship with creator God and be part of God's eternal plan.

Ephesians 3

8 Though I am the least deserving of all God's people, he graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ. 9 I was chosen to explain to everyone[c] this mysterious plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning. 10 God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was his eternal plan, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 Because of Christ and our faith in him, [d] we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence.

This is the same for us, as part of God's family, as members of the body of believers. We are not insignificant on this earth. Our simple words and small actions can influence and affect those around us. How we feel may sway from day to day but God's nature and plan for us never changes. Our confidence is not in our own abilities but in Jesus our Saviour and God our creator as Paul's prayer says in Ephesians chapter 3:

16 I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. 17 Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. 18 And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. 19 May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.



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