

This week is a combined message of being Empowered and Serving.
I've been using our vision statement to bring you each of the meanings.
I wonder over the last week if it's been on your radar to memorise it?
Visit our website stfrancis.co.nz to see it on the hm page.
Well its up on the screen, lets say it together. Are you ready?

Growing communities of people saved, healed, set free, disciple, equipped, empowered and serving.

The first part of the message today is looking at being Empowered.

Now in the message are a number of questions or reflections, don't worry if you miss some or don't get to write them down the full message will be on our website after 2pm today.

I'm not going to read any scripture passages here, but letting you know we are in the Book of Acts.

ACTS 1. Crucified! Buried! Risen! Everything Jesus said has proven true. More than a good teacher, more than a wise friend, Jesus is God of all.

A lot is changing in the lives of Jesus' first followers as they embark on leading the first Christian church.

Fear evaporates, and hope springs up as we encounter the risen Lord. Imagine the anticipation and excitement building among Jesus' followers as they waited for the Holy Spirit. What an amazing time to be part of the Church!

Jesus' promises and commands are as true for us as they were for the disciples. **Acts 1:8** says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The mission is not finished. God has called and empowered us to take the Gospel to the world.

Are you ready for God to move in your family? Do you long to see God at work in your workplace?
Are you eager for God to change your community? Are you eager for God to change this Church?
The time for waiting is over. God is moving!

The activated church is the hope of the world. As we follow the Holy Spirit's lead and operate in His power, the Gospel spreads to the ends of the earth. People meet Jesus and their lives begin to change.
The greedy become generous. The foolish become wise. The selfish become servants.

Are you ready for change around you? If so, begin by asking God to activate something new in you.
Think about this:

- Jesus tells the disciples in **Acts 1:8** that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes. What comes to mind when you think of the word "power"? Does your life exhibit the power of God?
- Who can you share the Gospel with today? Who can you invite to church?

Get out of your comfort zone

The book of Acts is an action book and a direct challenge to our natural desire to play it safe. Peter and John's trial before the Sanhedrin is just the beginning.

Acts 5.

God punishes a husband and wife for lying. Church leaders perform more miracles and wind up in prison. God breaks them out, and the church continues to grow.

Members of the early church endured prison, beatings, exposure to death, stoning, shipwrecks, sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, and nakedness as a result of proclaiming Jesus as Lord. Instead of quitting, they rejoiced when they suffered for Jesus.

Most of us have never been flogged for our faith. We shouldn't feel guilty that we haven't endured that kind of persecution. Rather, we should be challenged to stand up in our current circumstances. God placed us in this time and place St Francis so His name might be glorified now. Are we boldly sharing Jesus' message in every area of our lives or are we hiding behind apathy and comfort?

The reward of a life spent living boldly for Jesus far outweighs any temporary consequences we may endure. Who knows what the repercussions of sharing Jesus in your neighbourhood, workplace, or family will be. But we can be sure that whatever we face, Jesus is with us. In any situation, we can boldly share the Gospel.

Reflect: How is God challenging you to get out of your comfort zone today?

Moving from Acts 5 into Acts 7 where read **What a full life really looks like**

We hear about how Stephen defends himself to the Jewish religious leaders. The officials grew so furious they killed Stephen, making him the first Christian martyr.

Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy but I've come that you might have life and have it to the full" John 10:10. How do we measure fullness? How do we know if we are experiencing the fullness Jesus offers?

Stephen's recorded ministry career consisted of delivering food to widows and a brief sermon delivered to a group of stone-throwing religious zealots. In both examples, Stephen gave everything he had to the task. He performed faithfully behind the scenes receiving the thanks of a few well-fed widows, and he performed just as faithfully on a more public platform when death seemed his likely end. No doubt Stephen was motivated by an empty tomb and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Stephen's life was full despite its shortness. The measuring stick for fullness is not the length of our days, the number of our accomplishments, or the frequency of our happiness.

Stephen was boldly and faithfully obedient in every situation. He was all in. His life shows us that fullness is found in a life of Christ-centered purpose.

- How is God using you to accomplish His purposes at St Francis and St Andrews ?
Is there anything distracting you from fulfilling God's purpose in your life?

We move from Acts and encourage you to read the remainder of the Book of Acts and see how they are empowered and how the church grew.

For it to grow they the Christians had to also be active. How? By Serving

How does serving in the church grows your faith

Some time ago after several years of neglecting my relationship with Jesus, I knew it was time to go back to church.

Once back I felt God leading me to start serving. It took a few months to find the right spot, but God was faithful to lead me where I needed to be. This was through serving on the home group team. By leading the leaders, I discovered that serving was about so much more than filling a need. Serving is how God changes us.

So here are just Four Ways Serving and x8 Blessings in the Church Changed Me and Can Change You

1. Serving directly increases our faith.

Through serving, God gave me a front row seat to seeing Him change people's lives. That sounds a bit dramatic, but it's true.

Serving allows us to experience His power first hand ...

Watching God work in someone else's life increases our faith. In **John 2:1-11**, Jesus performs His first miracle at a wedding in Cana by turning the water into wine. Other than Mary, Jesus' mother, only the servers at the wedding witnessed this miracle. The wedding attendees received the benefit of the new wine, and the wedding party saved face because of the miracle, but it was the servers who had the first opportunity to witness Jesus' power. Serving allows us to experience His power first-hand and that naturally produces faith in us.

2. Serving helps us see and experience what we're made for.

Through serving, I have learned that my fullest joy comes from serving others. **Ephesians 2:10** tells us why: **"... we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do."**

Each of you has good works prepared and waiting for you. Don't miss them.

Whether you are tired or just going through the motions, I want you to hear this.

You have been gifted by God, and you are incredibly valuable to Him and the church. Ephesians 4 goes on to explain how important each individual is to the church.

Instead of trying to look, speak, and act the same, we are called to train each other up using the gifts, skills, and abilities God has given us. When we do, we'll find **"we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ"** (Ephesians 4:7-13, MSG).

You have been gifted by God, and you are incredibly valuable to Him and the church.

God also uses our serving, and those we serve with, to reveal our gifts to us. **1 Peter 4:10** says, **"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."**

When we are operating in our gifting to serve God and others, we experience the kind of joy we were made for! *vs 13 from the Message*

Fully alive like Christ

3. Serving draws us into authentic community.

If I had to choose one word to describe how serving has affected my life, it would be “community”. You have heard me talk about this in my time here.

Over all the years God has used the people I serve with to encourage me, pray for me, and teach me. My relationship with Jesus and others has flourished as a result.

In **John 17**, Jesus prayed for God to protect us so we would be one as He and the Father are one. This oneness is best experienced in and through participation in the church — by serving and loving one another well.

4. Serving requires obedience and redirects our focus to Jesus.

The simplest way to follow Jesus is by doing what He did. In **Matthew 20:28**, Jesus tells us He came to serve, not be served. By being obedient to follow Jesus in this way, we get to know Him on a new level because we experience first-hand His love for others.

When we begin to care for and serve others, God redirects our focus.

I personally have found this true about any problem I may be having, and begin to dwell in it, that a better way to diminish the significance of my problems (other than prayer) is to get the focus off of myself and to place it on others.”

Believing the lie that the church doesn’t need you will rob you of the joys God designed for you to experience through serving. Take a risk and get involved. God will honour that step of faith and grow it into so much more!

Just x4 ways of serving directly increases our faith / see and experience what we are made for / live in authentic community / requires obedience and redirects our focus to Jesus.

8 Blessings We Get From Serving

We all want our lives to matter. It’s the reason we do the things we do. We chase promotions and leadership positions because we want to make a difference. We encourage our kids to go to university, get a good job, in hopes that they, too, will make a difference.

There’s nothing wrong with wealth or influence, but those things alone won’t change the world and they aren’t what we were made for.

We were made to build the church (Ephesians 4:11-13). God made each one of us with unique talents, personalities and skill sets. And when we ask Jesus into our lives, we’re given at least one spiritual gift. We get the most joy and make the biggest difference when we use our God-given talents, gifts and abilities to build the church (Ephesians 4:14-16).

8 Blessings We Experience By Serving Others:

1. Serving allows us to discover and develop our spiritual gifts.

1 Corinthians 12 compares the church to a human body. Just like our bodies are made of many parts serving specific functions, the church is made up of people with different skills and abilities. Alone these pieces aren’t very useful, but together we create something beautiful.

2. Serving allows us to experience miracles.

In John 2, Jesus was at a wedding and the couple was running out of wine for its guests. the servants were the ones who witnessed the miracle. The same is true for us when we serve.

3. Serving allows us to experience the joy and peace that comes from obedience.

1 Peter 4:10-11 says, “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms... so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus

Christ.” Serving is a form of worship, a way to express gratitude for what Jesus has done for us, and to share the love and grace we've been given.

4. Serving helps us to be more like Jesus.

We shift our focus off of ourselves onto others through serving. We begin to see others as Jesus sees them. And we see Jesus IN others (Matthew 25:40).

5. Serving surrounds us with other Christians who can help us follow Jesus.

When we're working side by side with other people, remember forming a joint from last week? a bond inevitably forms. This was part of God's plan for how the church is supposed to work. That's why **Hebrews 10:24-25** instructs us to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together... but encouraging one another.”

6. Serving increases our faith.

As we move out of our comfort zones, God increases our faith by revealing new potential — in ourselves and in His Church here at st francis and st andrews. When we see what He can do when His power is at work within us, we begin looking for the doors He's opening rather than pushing our way through the one's He's closed (Ephesians 3:20).

7. Serving allows us to experience God's presence in new ways.

Encouragement and healing go hand in hand. As we encourage others and they find healing, we're encouraged. It's the reason so many people who go on mission trips say they came home feeling like they got more than they gave.

8. Serving is good for your soul.

Studies have shown that volunteering is so good for the mind and body that it can ease symptoms of stress and depression. Tapping into our gifts and passions builds self-confidence, energy, and strength. Serving others can also be the best distraction from our own worries.

We make all sorts of rational explanations for not serving:

I don't have time.

I don't know what I would do.

I don't have any special skills to contribute.

They don't need me.

But the reality is the Lord doesn't call the equipped; He equips the called.

Remember it's not about being able it's about your availability.

God used men and women with similar doubts to change the course of history.

Moses didn't think he was a leader or speaker, but God worked through Moses to bring Israel out of slavery.

David was the youngest (and therefore most insignificant) of all his brothers, but God worked through David to defeat a giant and eventually made him a king.

Paul used to kill Christians before he met Jesus, but he went on to become one of the most highly-regarded and prolific writers/church planters in history.

God doesn't just want to work through you, He wants to work in you

for st francis' mission. To take you from the comfort zone you have been keeping yourself in. Are you all in? We cannot miss what Jesus has here for us to do now.