

On May 1, 2003, US president George W Bush made a televised speech from an aircraft carrier. In this speech he said, "In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed." And behind the podium that he spoke from, there was a huge banner that said, "Mission Accomplished."

The problem was of course, that the war in Iraq was far from over. It carried on for many more years and the vast majority of the casualties happened after this Mission Accomplished banner was unveiled.

We're not going to make the same mistake today on this our 20 year anniversary. This is not a Sunday to pat ourselves on the back and declare that our job is done, that our mission has been accomplished.

Jesus told us to "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Matthew 28:19-20

And this mission is far from over. There are still many in this world and in Enniscorthy, who don't know Jesus or what he has done for them. There are many who've not yet put their faith in him – who're still lost and heading to a lost eternity.

So our mission is not accomplished. But it's good to pause today – both to look back at what has been done. But also to look forward to all that is still to do.

So let's have a very quick look back over the past 20 years.

1. Look Back

It is great to look back and see what God has done in this church over the past 20 years. But what should our attitude be when we do this?

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul was writing about the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. This included the Old Testament Scriptures and numerous eye-witnesses. But then Paul went on to say this in 1 Corinthians 15:8-10: "And last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me."

a) A Transformed Identity

Paul called himself "An apostle." 1 Corinthians 15:9 He was a witness to the Risen Lord and had been personally appointed by him to take the gospel to others.

But in saying this, Paul wasn't boasting. He wasn't being arrogant, proud or full of himself. That's because he knew that he did not earn the right to be called an apostle.

After all, when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he'd dedicated his life to stamping out the gospel. He was going there to hunt for Christians, arrest them and arrange for them to be killed. No wonder, he said, "I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle." 1 Corinthians 15:9.

But meeting Jesus changed him. He went from being an enemy of God to a child of God, from a persecutor of the church to an apostle of Christ!

This wasn't something that Paul deserved, earned or worked for. It wasn't even something that he'd been searching for. This was a gift of God's outrageous grace. "But by the grace of God I am what I am." 1 Corinthians 15:10

Paul understood that who he was, the role that he had and the ministry he was involved in was all completely due to the grace of God - the unmerited, incredible free gift of God, paid for in full by Christ on the cross.

b) A Transformed Life

But meeting Jesus hadn't just changed Paul's identity. It had also transformed his life. He said, "And his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them." 1 Corinthians 15:10

From an enemy of the gospel, Paul became a committed and passionate preacher of the gospel. At great personal cost he tirelessly worked to introduce people to Christ, to establish them in their faith and encourage them to live wholeheartedly for him.

And he'd been remarkably effective in doing this. Hundreds came to Christ through his ministry and many churches were planted. And Paul rejoiced in all of this.

But he took none of the credit for it. He took none of the praise. Instead he recognized that this too was a gift from God. "Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." 1 Corinthians 15:10

Paul didn't serve out of guilt or fear or an attempt to make amends for his past. Instead, this was in response to and empowered by the same amazing grace of God that had brought him to Christ in the first place!

Everything he was and everything that he accomplished in his life was a gift from God. His life didn't show how great Paul was. It showed how great God is. All the glory and all the praise went to God!

c) A Time to Glorify God

And it's the same for us this morning. If we've trusted in Jesus, then we are children of God, part of his church. We are his ambassadors, called to be salt and light in Enniscorthy, as we were hearing about last week.

But this isn't because God saw good in us. It isn't because of anything we have done. It is all of God's marvellous, outrageous grace. "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no-one can boast." Ephesians 2:8-9

We are God's children this morning because of the cross of Jesus, where he took our sins and gave us his righteousness. It's because of God's unmerited and undeserved love for us.

And as we look back over the past 20 years as a church and get excited

- That people's lives have been changed.
- That God's love has been demonstrated.
- That kids, teenagers and adults have heard the gospel.
- That some have come into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus.
- That Christians have been built up in their faith.
- That people have gone from here to serve the Lord in other parts of Ireland and beyond.

We don't take any of the credit for that. We don't do it to receive the praise.

What has happened in and through this church is not due to our church leadership, worship team, outreach team, kids and youth workers or anyone else who has been committed to being part of this church.

It is all due to the grace of God! It is God's work. Motivated and empowered by his grace and love.

Yes, it required effort, sacrifice and love. Yes we thank God for everyone who has been part of this church or supported it through giving and prayer. But like with Paul, this is the evidence of God working in us. As we saw a few weeks ago, "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Philippians 2:13

So this anniversary service is an opportunity to glorify God. To look back at the miracle of what God has done and say, "The LORD has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes." Psalm 118:23

2. Look Forward

It's great to be able to look back and give God the glory for all that he has done. But this morning we also want to look forward. This is what Paul encouraged the church in Corinth to do at the end of 1 Corinthians 15.

"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain." 1 Corinthians 15:58

a) Stand firm

We've had many good times over the past 20 years. But we've also had some really tough times.

As we've looked at the pictures this morning we've seen some people who are no longer with us. Some have passed away or moved to other areas. But others are no longer with us because problems arose, relationships broke down or because they stumbled in their faith and no longer walk with the Lord.

In our prayer time, I'd like us to pray for those people, that God will bring the healing and restoration that they need.

But it reminds us that following Jesus is not easy. And so as we look forward, we know that there will be difficult times ahead. Maybe caused

- By circumstances that hurt or disappoint us.
- By difficult people who might offend or criticise us or seek to lead us astray.
- Or even by our own weaknesses and failures,

But this is why Paul encouraged the believers to **"Stand firm. Let nothing move you."** 1 Corinthians 15:58 Whatever happens, whatever issues or struggles we face, we must not give up.

- We need to stand firm in the truth of God's Word.
- We must not walk away from our faith in Christ.
- We need to keep worshipping and serving together as a church of his people.

i) Jesus is Alive

But how can we do this? Well, this verse starts with the word **"Therefore..."** 1 Corinthians 15:58.

Paul wanted these Christians to stand firm based on what he'd just written about – the certainty of the resurrection of Jesus. It is this reality that will enable us to stand firm no matter what.

That's because, Jesus' resurrection declares that his death on the cross was all that we need to be saved.

- It is the receipt guaranteeing that our sins were paid for in full.
- And it is also the proof of his victory over sin and death.
- And so, **"He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."** Hebrews 7:25

So no matter what, we don't need to give up. We don't need to pack it in. We don't need to be afraid. We can stand firm, because Jesus is able to save us from start to finish.

And so we can look back over 20 years and celebrate that by God's grace we've been saved from our sin, held by his hands and transformed by his love.

But we can also look forward in confidence that we can keep standing firm, because by his grace

- Jesus will completely save us.
- He will never leave us nor forsake us.
- He will never let us go.
- He will never stop working in our lives.
- That, as we read a while back in Philippians, **"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."** Philippians 1:6

b) Serve wholeheartedly

But we're not just called to stand firm. We're also called to serve wholeheartedly.

This also comes to us as a gift of God's grace. **"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."** Ephesians 2:10

As the body of Christ, we've all been given different gifts, different roles and different areas of ministry. And all of us are necessary. All of us are needed. There are no spare parts. Just like Paul, we have all been saved to serve.

And this is costly. Our role may be,

- Pointing people to Jesus,
- Caring for others,
- Leading a Bible study,
- Teaching kids,
- Encouraging believers,
- Being a consistent witness at home or work or college,
- Interceding in prayer

But whatever it is, it always makes demands on us. To fulfil it, we need to be willing to give our time, our resources, our

energy, our very selves.

And so if we are going to move forward as a church, if we are going to fulfil our purpose, then we need to [“Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.”](#) 1 Corinthians 15:58.

We need to be committed to keep on serving the Lord wholeheartedly.

i) It is Always Worthwhile

But why should we do this? Well, because it is always worthwhile. Paul wrote, [“Because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.”](#) 1 Corinthians 15:58

There are loads of things that we might do with our lives that are in vain. Things that in the end are unimportant, empty and a waste of time and effort.

But whatever we do for the Lord is never in vain. No matter how small or insignificant it might seem, no matter what results we can see from it, no matter if anyone else notices or appreciates it – whatever we do for him, for the building of his kingdom, in the power that he gives, for his glory of his name, will never be meaningless. It will never be a waste of time. It will never be overlooked.

Jesus said, [“If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”](#) Matthew 10:42

Our work for the Lord will always be worthwhile because it has an eternal impact. One of Lorna’s favourite quotes is from a guy called C T Studd. She has it on our office wall. It says:

“Only one life – will soon be past,
Only what’s done for God will last.”

ii) It is the Lord We’re Serving

But there’s another reason why we should serve wholeheartedly. Not just because it is worthwhile, but because it is [“The work of the Lord.”](#) 1 Corinthians 15:58

We’re called to give ourselves fully because we are serving our Lord and Saviour, the one who loved us so much that he gave himself for us.

A life of serving the Lord is a simple act of gratitude and worship for all that he has done for us. [“I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.”](#) Romans 12:1

Conclusion

So this brings us back to God’s grace. Today we’ve celebrated God’s incredible grace in our lives. How Jesus has transformed our identity and our lives by

- Bringing us to faith in Jesus.
- Adopting us into his family
- Uniting us into his church
- And faithfully guiding, empowering, providing and protecting us these 20 years.

So what else can we do in response to him but renew our commitment to

- Stand firm in our faith in him, depending on his power to complete the work he has begun in our lives.
- And serve wholeheartedly, giving ourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because we know that our labour in the Lord is not in vain!

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