

## Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> June – Volunteer Sunday

Romans 12: 1-13 GNT

Mark 6: 30-44 NRSV

(show picture on the screen of Des Smith)

Does any one know who this is?

His name is Des Smith and in December he was the winner of the BBC Sports Personality of the Year Unsung hero award.

To me that's always the most inspirational part of the whole programme. Instead of focussing on often over-paid professional sports men and women who train full time to achieve their goals, this award celebrates someone from the community who has given of their time voluntarily to change peoples lives.

Des Smith has been involved with Sheffield Caribbean sports club for 60 years – since he came to the UK as a 13 year old in 1965 - and has been one of the driving forces behind the club for nearly 40 years

Des has been at the heart of the club's journey to where it is now – seeing the community hub rise from providing a safe haven for a handful of young people to now supporting five cricket teams, eight junior football sides, while also catering for netball and hockey teams.

And the wonderful thing is that there are hundreds, thousands of people like Des

People of all ages, backgrounds and creeds. Those involved in sports, those involved in the environment or local history; those who pick up litter in the park or help out in the charity shops; those who sort food at the foodbank or answer the phone at Samaritans; and countless more who do any number of things because they want to make life better for those around them

Many Thousands of people who give up time energy (and very often money) to make the world a better place.

Today we are celebrating the importance and commitment of volunteers - It is National Volunteer week.

So many organisations; so many community activities can only happen because of volunteers – and I know many people here volunteer for a whole range of organisations across the community – as well as here in the church

And in one sense the church is no different from those other activities in needing volunteers

Here in Shirley Parish so much of what we do depends on people giving up time and energy and more. (just as Margaret and Linda have shared this morning)

The things happening this week

Open the Book  
Bible Art  
Welcome Café  
Craft Club  
Churchyard Group  
Mothers Union  
Jimmy Tots  
Friends of St James

And other weeks

Lunch Club, Ploughmans, Coffee mornings, Journeys, Messy Church, Church repairs and projects, magazine, flowers, sacristy, cleaning, publicity, keeping track of the finances, locking & unlocking the building

And in our worship services – welcome, readings, intercessions, refreshments, and today leading our new kids church

(and I am sure I have missed much out!!)

But for us as Christians there is one major difference from that of others who volunteer in the community. We are doing it not just for the community, but for God and in response for all that God has done for us.

And this is spelt out in that opening verse from Romans chapter 12. ***Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God. This is the true worship that you should offer.***

Perhaps when we think about worship, we usually think only of what we do on Sundays. What we are doing now. But Paul is making it very clear here that worship goes way beyond that.

Worship is giving worth to God; giving honour to God

And we do that Yes – by singing his praise as we do this morning

But also by the way we live our lives.

By what we do Monday to Saturday as well as on Sunday.

The way we live being a response to God for what God has done for us

And Paul goes on in this passage to talk about how we should do that. By using the gifts and skills we have been given by God.

*So we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us. If our gift is to speak God's message, we should do it according to the faith that we have; if it is to serve, we should serve; if it is to teach, we should teach; if it is to encourage others, we should do so. Whoever shares with others should do it generously; whoever has authority should work hard; whoever shows kindness to others should do it cheerfully.*

The gospel reading today is the well known story of the feeding of the 5000.

The story of Jesus miraculously feeding 5000 people

But it could only have been done with others playing their part

The young boy who in John's gospel we are told gives the loaves and fish to Jesus. The disciples by taking the food around (and probably not just the 12 apostles but most likely a whole band of followers – think – how many would it take to physically give out the food to 5000 people!

And that is repeated elsewhere in the NT – and throughout the Bible  
God's work is best done when people share in it; when it is done together  
When people offer themselves, their gifts, skills, abilities, money as a response to God

So today as we think about this National Volunteers week we celebrate all the volunteering done in and for our churches. We celebrate all the worship we give with our lives –

And as we celebrate this volunteering and those who volunteer I hope each one of us can prayerfully consider how we use what God has given us. How we live out our lives for him. How we use the gifts God has given us. What we offer back to him

The gifts that Paul mentions here are down to earth practical things – and I am sure that every one of us can find something here that resonates. And we should remember too that these are just examples – its not an exhaustive list.

Speaking the word of God (not just up front on Sundays; its through causal conversations, telling our story)

Serving – putting others first; washing up at the café; cleaning the church building

Teaching –kids church; open the book etc and just by example as well as by word;

Encouraging – looking for the good in people; building them up

Sharing – a recognition that all we have comes from God – money, possessions, time

Leading – Paul talks of authority – I see leadership itself as a gift that some of us have

Kindness – being nice to others; looking out for them; random acts of kindness

(talk about those)

SO maybe you have recently started coming to church ; maybe you haven't been a Christian long; or maybe you find yourself with more time on your hands than previously.

Perhaps you've heard something today that makes you want to offer yourself in a new way

This is not a push for the very busy to do even more; it's a plea for us each to recognise that we are part of the body and have a role to play. That God has given us much and it is right (we might even say our duty) to offer much back to him.

Is that you ?

– you probably know what your gifts are; what you are particularly skilled at and good at. Or maybe you aren't sure. Come and have a chat after the service with me or with Richard. We'll talk with you and pray with you as we explore what God has in store for you.

And within our church community we aim to be supportive of each other as we take on roles; as we offer ourselves. You won't just be left to get on with it. You will be helped and encouraged; you will be part of a team. You will find you belong!

And another wonderful thing is that although we do this for God and as a response to God, we all find that we ourselves grow and develop through our volunteering and we generally enjoy it too!

As I see it, volunteering in all its aspects is a win win. The community gains; the churches gain and we ourselves gain as we grow and develop as individuals.

In a moment Richard is going to lead us all in an act of commitment to serve God. The word "ministry" is used to embrace all the things we do. Don't be put off by it – it shows that as we volunteer; as we offer our gifts and skills we are ministering to each other and the community – we are meeting a need.

And we urge you to join in – however big or small you consider your contribution. Whether it's in the past, in the here and now or something you want to do in the future. These words will be an opportunity to commit ourselves to God