

What should I return to the Lord?

1. The first sermon...

At 10am on Sunday 3rd February, the chaplain conducted the service.

The service was held in the open air.

There is a monument on the corner of Bligh and Hunter street that memorializes this event.

Can you guess who, when and where?

The year was 1788, the chaplain was Richard Johnson,
and the service was the first Christian service for the Colony of New South Wales.

The text that Richard Johnson chose to preach on was Psalm 116 verses 12 and 13.

I'll read them to you - << Ppt >>

Richard Johnson has just been at sea for 8 months.

Not only were there high seas, storms, and the usual difficulties that are the same for us today,

Back in 1788, there was also poor diet, starvation, disease...

The boats were so small (100 feet by 30 feet)

that living, eating and sleeping conditions below were unbearable.

And they've just arrived in a foreign land, not knowing what they would encounter.

And in the midst of all this – Richard Johnson recalls all the good that God has done.

It's one of those moments where there is the moment of clarity in the midst of the chaos.

For Richard Johnson, in a world in which they had so little control over life and death,

So little control over whether they would survive in this foreign land or not,

Richard Johnson, remember all that God has done for him.

And so I've chosen this text, to preach on today,

Because it is important for us to reflect upon all the goodness

that God has done here at St Mark's

And I want to set forth for you, a picture of all the good that God is doing here at St Mark's.

Firstly, because you may not be aware of all the good that God is doing

And therefore I'm hoping it will encourage you.

But secondly, because we're facing our own challenges today,

That we'll come to in due time.

2. "All his bounty to me"

So first, the Psalmist writes of "all the good" that Yahweh has done for me.

In the midst of the trials that the Psalmist endures

– 'the snares of death' v. 2, 'distress and anguish' v. 3

The Psalmist has called out to God – "O LORD, I pray, save my life!"

In the midst of the crucible that the Psalmist has endured, God somehow has saved, God somehow has delivered, God somehow has rescued the Psalmist from the jaws of death itself.

The bounty of God has been shown to the Psalmist in a very personal way.

The bounty of God, working and acting to bring the Psalmist from death to life,
drives the Psalmist to praise God.

And as God's people, we bask in all the goodness God has shown to us in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For we bask in all the goodness of the salvation Jesus has won, the love Jesus demonstrated,

The death he died, the resurrection life we now have...

But today, I want to share with you, all the ways in which God has acted here at St Mark's.

I want to share with you all the bounty that the Lord has showered upon us.

Local Church

I want to start by letting you know about something very exciting.

We're starting a new Sunday service.

As a number of our members can no longer travel up to St Mark's, we're going to them.

Starting on Father's day, Sunday 6th September,

we're starting a 3.30pm service at Mary Andrew's Village.

There are multiple reasons for this.

First, there is a desperate need for a service at M.A.V on a Sunday – it is probably one of the only Anglican Retirement Villages in Sydney that doesn't have a regular Sunday service!

Second, our monthly service, at M.A.V has grown in size so that we're averaging about 25 people.

Third, every soul is precious in the sight of God,

even though our society might discard you when you've reached 'that age and stage'.

So if you'd like to be involved, we're having a special planning meeting next Sunday, 23rd August, 11.30am after church. And whether you can be involved or not, please do pray for the people and the planning

Second, we've had so many people join St Mark's in the past year or so, that we're putting on a special lunch for newcomers in September.

We've had people who, for various reasons, have now been able to return to St Mark's.

We've had people who were simply invited by a friend to come along, and have joined the church. We've had families join, we've had workers join, we've had retirees join. We can thank God for so many people that have connected to St Mark's and to our Lord J.C.

Third, did you know that our Sunday Club continues to grow?

When the Greenwood family first arrived, we doubled the Sunday Club.

Now we have about 15 regulars, and we've really needed to setup Club Creche for the babies.

You may have all seen what was previously the warden's vestry transformed into Club crèche.

Last Sunday there were 7 children in the Club crèche, and about 20 in Sunday Club!

In fact, we're planning on having a special outreach campaign leading into Christmas (coinciding with Advent), to bring all the children and parents to whom we've made connections, along to church.

Fourth, we now have our own Women's Bible Fellowship Group that meets on a Wednesday morning. That was something that was brought to my attention when we first arrived.

The need for a bible study group that met during the day, and specifically catered for women.

Well, praise God, because it has been brought to into reality.

Fifth, our connection with St Mark's preschool is going from strength to strength. Not only are we getting on top of the Preschool licence situation, ask me for more info if you really want. But we're working together towards the Fete, and it is great to see that communication happen. Even more, we're now building a connection between St Mark's preschool, and the preschool in Mubabmiro, with the pygmies. Having our preschool supporting their preschool is a wonderful initiative.

Sixth, one that is close to my heart – God has blessed us with a great staff team. Doug continues in his role in ministering to Seniors, a couple of weeks ago, being able to minister to a member of the Bay Nursing home, who was only hours away from death. Steve and Liz are a vital part of our 10am service, and Steve is at 8am. Both Steve and Liz, along with Alison starting up our own Friday Club, reaching out to infants and primary age school kids. And then, Alison Collins, is our wonderful children's minister – who has made a huge impact, she really has hit the ground running!

God has indeed poured out his bounty upon us here at St Mark's.

Local Community

But then, did you know about the inroads we're making into the local community?

Did you know that E.S.L has started up? Yes – but did you know that we had a lovely lady knock on our door one Friday morning, looking for a place for her ESL group to meet, as she could no longer use her previous venue. As a result, and many thanks to Marty Golding, we now have a group of about 15 people coming to St Mark's to learn E.S.L on a Sunday morning. And flowing out of that – we've had already had people come to church on a Sunday. There's been a man visit the 8am service, and a family visit the 10am service.

Did you know about how our Music Time classes on a Friday morning are going gang-busters? If I can take a moment to brag, Rachel, in my honest opinion, is the best preschool children's music educator in Sydney, and the word has got out.

She started Music time on Friday, and 14 parents came with 15 children.

The next week, she ran two classes, with even more parents and children.

The third week, she ran three classes, with a baby class after the first two.

One of those mum's was a preschool mum who innocently commented –

“Oh, I just thought it was an empty building”

Well, the kids are coming back to St Mark's.

Even better – I was just chatting with a Dad on Friday, who came to music class.

He thought it was wonderful that we're providing such a community service.

This was a Dad that I'd met last year at our Christmas service...

And as I was chatting on Friday, and he was happy to chat about spiritual matters,
we both thought it would be great to get the families together for lunch.

Then he rang me up, yesterday afternoon, to offer the use of his Kayak, anytime...

Another aspect of connecting with the local community is representing St Mark's in the community. Of course, one aspect of this is fighting against the Kings Head tavern...

And you'll be glad to know, we've won the next round.

Kogarah city Council has informed us that the Kings Head Tavern is not pursuing it's latest D.A mo.

On a personal note, I've started to build relationships with Councillor Katheryn Lansbury and Councillor Jacinta Petroni, who have been very helpful.

So much so, that when the Kogarah Residents Association used our church hall for their 'discussion' And even though they tried to verbally lynch Councillor Lansbury,
and she handled the situation with decorum and calm and grace.

Afterwards she mentioned that she's more than happy to catch up again.

And on the federal level, David Coleman, the member for banks,

Has similarly been very helpful in his role.

This is all good news for St Mark's – as we seek the best interests of our community, the community of South Hurstville and surrounding suburbs.

The next step will be to connect with the state member, Mark Coure, that's on the To-Do List.

Finally, our relationship with Connells Point School – God continues to open doors into the school.

Last year we hosted the Carols by Candlelight for Connells Point School, which was great!

This year we're hosting their Movie Night event!

That's right – on Friday 28th August – the whole school is invited to our church hall.

At the very least – it makes it so much easier to invite families down the track – 'you know – where you had the movie night? That's right – well, you're more than welcome to come to church...'

Now, I could say so much more, about how God has blessed us.

And I've only covered the new initiatives that have been undertaken,

And it is right to acknowledge how God has blessed us through the ongoing ministries of St Mark's

From Christian meditation to Taize to Fridays@home, Carinya, Mother's Union, Tai Chi,

Book busters, needle and thread, the art group...

And the wonderful concerts that have been put on – from our first Hymnfest event, to our

Rogers and Hammestein Concert...

God has done so much good to us.

3. What shall I render? Nothing and everything

And so, with all this in view, with all God's bounty to us,
The Psalmist asks a single question – what shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness?

The answer is simple – nothing and everything.

Nothing – in that there is nothing that we can give to God that he actually needs.
There is nothing that we can supply to God that he is lacking.

And yet, there is everything.

Our lives have been so radically altered by our Lord Jesus Christ,
That we now live our whole lives as a 'living sacrifice' to him.
We willingly give up our lives for the one who has given his life.
Grace has abounded to us, and therefore grace flows out from us.

In a little while, Bruce Cooke will speak to you about our financial situation.
We have reached one of those turning points that all churches inevitably go through.
We have reached a cross-roads that requires us to act.

And so, as we discuss the financial situation, I seek to address our motivation behind the situation.
That is, I have outlined all the good things God has been doing here at St Mark's
So that you can be encouraged in the grace poured out on us.

I have outlined all the good things God has been doing,
So that you can be motivated by grace to support the ministry here.

We have reached a point where we can act together, in response to God's grace.
For the reality is that whilst we have done brilliantly in raising funds for the ministry of tomorrow,
Whilst we can thank God for the many generous hearts supporting children's ministry,
The reality is that we currently have fallen way behind in funds for the ministry of today,
The reality is that we cannot maintain the current financial trajectory.

In the midst of all this, and as we talk further, as we pray further
– and we're having a special prayer meeting on Monday night,
Please be motivated, not by guilt, not by compulsion, not by seeking to impress God,
Please be motivated by all the good things God has done for us.
Please let the outpouring of God's grace, help us to rise to the challenge before us.

So let me lead us in prayer.

Let's pray.