

JUST DOING IT

→ The last Methodist Circuit in which Leslie and I served was part of a different Methodist District from this one and at the time we had a Chair of District who was well known for using the catchphrase – “Just Do It.” Whatever idea, project or plan you came up with, providing it was within the realms of what was acceptable and appropriate as part of the mission of the church he would always encourage you to “just do it” and he often preached about the need to have a “just do it” spirit!

.....Those of you who are here this morning as parents of young children will perhaps find yourselves over the coming weeks, months and years, encouraging your children to “just do it!” Yes, you’ll want to keep them safe. Yes, you’ll want to be alongside them. But, there will be times when you will want them to discover that they can do things, whether it’s riding a bike or swimming a length. You’ll be there cheering them on as they realise their potential!

.....Now, of course, for some of us, people who are always enthusiastic and positive about things can be really irritating because maybe we’re the kind of people who want to analyse things, and think them through and weigh up all the risks and find a few reasons why we can’t do things first. But actually, as people of God, we have every reason to be “just do it” kind of people and the passage of scripture that we’ve heard this morning encourages us to think in that way.

→ The backdrop to this story is that the people of Israel had just returned home to Jerusalem, after seventy years of living in captivity. Everything in their homeland had been destroyed and the place had lain in ruins through all these years. So, they have to start everything from scratch. They have to rebuild their homes, they have to build the Temple of God where they can gather together to worship and they need to rebuild the walls of the city.

.....On a smaller scale, that’s exactly what we’ve seen people up and down this land needing to do in recent weeks. Homes and businesses that have been destroyed by flood waters coming in not just once, but several times over during these days and people being faced with having to start from scratch and rebuild their lives. A task that undoubtedly feels like a mountain to climb and impossible to achieve but one in which people encourage and help one another as the work begins.

.....In our story this morning Zerubbabel was the leader of the group. He organised the people to rebuild the Temple. But as so often happens, they started on the work with great enthusiasm and then they became weary and discouraged. Their numbers were small and what they could do seemed feeble when they made comparisons with what their ancestors had achieved. So the people became demoralised and wanted to give up. The work was difficult and their resources were very limited. Could they really do it? Would their feeble efforts really make a difference?

.....The people are downhearted and discouraged and it’s at this time that God comes and speaks to them through the prophet Zechariah. God gave Zechariah eight messages through eight visions in one night. And the passage that we have

read today contains God's fifth message. The Lord said to Zerubbabel "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit. Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit!"

→ As we come towards the end of this series in which we have been looking at the Holy Spirit, who he is and what he brings to and achieves in our lives, this morning we acknowledge that it is the Spirit of God who enables us to discern God's will and then gives us the strength to do it, even when it may seem like an impossible task to us.

.....So, what are the things that we can learn from this very brief passage of scripture this morning as we add it to all that has gone before in these recent weeks. Well, first of all we perhaps recognise that God has many plans and purposes that he wants to see come to fruition in his world and in most cases the only way they can happen is through ordinary people like us. So, he longs for us to get a feel for what those plans and purposes are and one of the ways in which we can do that is through our praying. As we pray, we may not always get direct answers, but we generally grow in our sense of understanding the general direction in which God would want us to travel.

.....The people of Israel had been brought back to the city of Jerusalem after a long absence and what they find is not an appealing site. But you can imagine that having arrived there, they would perhaps have got a sense of the fact that God wanted them to remain there and to rebuild that city. And Zerubbabel their leader gets this message that every obstacle that seems to be in their way at the moment will disappear. Now, we know that mountains don't just disappear, but, when we pray, those mountains can start to look rather more like molehills and with the help of God's Spirit we grow in our understanding of how to tackle them or slowly, we recognise that they're not such a problem after all.

.....You see, when we're faced with a huge, or seemingly impossible task which we sense God may be asking us to take on, we need to pray, not so much about whether God wants us to do it or not, but to seek God's help in doing it, so that mountains can be removed, and so that what seems impossible, becomes possible. Our prayers will help us to see more clearly the way ahead and give us greater confidence in God's Spirit to help us do it.

→ Is there something in your life that you sense God is asking you to tackle right now, but it feels big! It looks like a mountain from where you're standing, so surely it can't be something that God wants you to do. A job that you've been challenged to take on in the church or in the workplace, a problem in the family or in the workplace that needs to be resolved, a personal matter that you know you need to address? Whatever it is, pray about it so that you might grow in your understanding of what God wants you to do and in your confidence that God can enable you to do it.

.....The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Galatians wrote, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Some of us are perhaps tempted sometimes to give up before we've even started because everything just looks too hard and too painful and too time

consuming. Let's not give up so easily and remember that God would have us "just do it!"

→ But, of course, as we've mentioned in previous weeks, we do find it quite easy to find reasons why we can't or shouldn't do things or can't or shouldn't change. "This is the way I've been made, so the fruit of the Spirit won't grow in me. I know you say that God gives gifts to everyone but he hasn't given any to me. This is just too much for me – I wouldn't know where to start!" I've heard those things said so many times and every time I hear anything like that my heart sinks! Why? Because it goes against everything that God says and everything that God promises!

.....In some cases we are absolutely right that we can't manage the things that are before us – at least not on our own! But, God so often uses what is little and what is weak to achieve his purposes. God used the rod of Moses to part the Red Sea and let all his people get across safely. He used David's sling and one small stone to defeat the giant Goliath. He used a basket to lower the apostle Paul down a wall so that he could escape from those that were trying to kill him. He fed five thousand people with just five small loaves and two small fish. And the widow at Zarephath had just a little flour and a little oil left but with that she fed the prophet Elijah and her own family for many days.

.....You see, it's not about how small we feel, or how inadequate we feel, or how ill equipped we feel. It's so much more about how big our God is. We will always be unable to achieve very much on our own – we can't change lives, we can't transform situations, but the Spirit of God working in us can. Remember what Jesus said – "Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." You see, when Jesus returned to the Father, the Holy Spirit came and makes it possible for even the weakest and most frail human beings to do amazing things for him.

→ So, we're called to pray for the help of the Spirit and we're called to make ourselves available to God however, weak or small or insignificant we may feel and finally, we are called to have faith in God that the work he asks us to do can be done. When we read God's word, we notice that when God calls people to do things for him, he often calls them to do things that are far from easy. He didn't call Moses over to a burning bush and ask him to just take care of a few more sheep. Oh no! He has to face the mighty Pharaoh and bring the people out of Egypt. God asked Noah to build an ark, and he asked Abraham to leave his home and move to somewhere that God would show him only once he was on the way and he asked Paul to preach the gospel in the face of persecution and imprisonment. And in my experience, if we get to a point where what we are doing is becoming second nature because we've been doing it for a while and it's feeling easy, then God will usually place the next more challenging task in front of us so that we continually have to rely on and trust in him!

.....And when we do that, when we trust in him, we find that we can do what he has asked. The work can be completed as God promised the people of Israel when they began to rebuild the Temple and history tells us that's exactly what happened. The Temple was rebuilt as the people trusted in God to equip them with the power of the Spirit for the work they had to do. You see, the will of God will never lead us to

where the grace of God cannot keep us. When he calls us to do something, he will give us the strength to do it. When he calls us to move, he will show us the way and whatever God calls us to do it can be done as we rely on the strength of the Spirit. For it's not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord! And he continues to pour that Spirit upon us, just as oil pours from a jug when we make ourselves available to him.

.....So, as we celebrate this Church Anniversary together and as we draw this period of weeks in which we have considered the person and work of the Holy Spirit in our lives to a close, may each and everyone of us commit ourselves afresh to praying that we might become more convinced of what God is asking of us, to being willing to play our part as God plays his and to having faith in God and persevering in that work. And as we serve him in that way, relying on his strength, may all the glory go to him.