

Bolton Parish Sermon – Happy and Mariyam

Let the words of our mouths, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength, and our redeemer. Amen.

It is a pleasure for us to come and speak to you today on a topic that we are very passionate about and linking that to our Socktober project. Firstly, there are 2 words that the children at Bishop Bridgeman have become very familiar with, Courageous Advocacy. At our last Ethos Conference, we were courageous advocates on the theme of peace.

So what does it mean to be a courageous advocate? You can see our courageous Advocacy cape (twirl!) but all of us whatever our age – and that includes all of us here today - have invisible super-hero capes and can be a hero or a courageous advocate- we just need to believe that they are there.

When you are courageous, you must be brave. If you are an advocate, you are helping someone. Jesus told us that the Father would send an advocate to be with us. In St John's, gospel Jesus says "And I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever." In school we hold 'Speak up, Speak out' days, where we pledge not to be bystanders and speak up and help others. In being courageous advocates, we speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. The bible says in Proverbs 31:8-9. "Speak up for those who cannot speak up for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

As an Ethos group, after much discussion, we decided to be courageous advocates for the homeless people in Manchester by supporting the charity Greater Together Manchester. Winston Churchill said "Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak." We must go beyond compassion and become concerned for justice and inequality. By doing this, we can make a difference. Let us go back to Proverbs 31. "Speak up for people who cannot speak for themselves. Protect the rights of all who are helpless." Who did Jesus speak up for? In Luke's gospel he spoke up for the women, children, tax-collectors, the poor, the outcast and the foreigner. Just think for a minute (pause) – who would Jesus speak up for today? (pause)

Being a courageous advocate isn't always easy, but speak up even if your voice shakes. Think of the story of the Good Samaritan- the story is about both helping and speaking up. The story promotes being kind, but also the deep challenge of a hero who would have been a despised foreigner in the eyes of the Jewish community of the time – someone with the wrong racial and religious pedigree, whom the listeners might have expected to kill the needy traveller. Jesus included him in the story as its hero – he spoke up for an outcast community. Our Christian values such as Hope, Faith, Love and Trust will help us all develop a sense of courageous advocacy. As an Ethos group we have written postcards for the Postcards of Kindness Initiative and posted them to residential homes across the country and in America.

St Luke 1:37 says, "Faith does not make things easy; it makes them possible!" Everyone in our Ethos group is a service star, supporting and helping others in school and in our community. We will be making twiddle aprons for DCAFE, which is a safe place for Alzheimer patients to attend. Twiddle aprons provide visual and tactile stimulation to help anxiety and express feelings. Some of these patients do not have family to visit them or care about them.

As well as being courageous advocates, we can all be servant leaders.

Martin Luther King Jr. said "Everybody can be great..... because anybody can serve. You don't need a college degree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. And a soul generated by love." A definition of being a servant-leader is from a writer Robert K. Greenleaf "The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?"

We believe our school is a community where people come first where we support each other to grow, develop and shine. Is it not then our servant duty to support the more vulnerable members of our communities and society? We aim to encourage everyone to become servant-leaders, to provide opportunities for children and adults to lead and serve, therefore raising the quality of life for all. We have the ultimate example of servant leadership in Jesus, he was a great leader, but firstly a great servant.

In the Bible there are over 1300 references to servant/ service or serve. St Mark 10 "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles, lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Servant leadership is about:

- * Serving others, not yourself.
- * Servant leaders are called to a purpose, not a position.
- * Servant leaders listen.
- * Servant leaders build a community.
- * Servant leaders focus on the needs of others.

An example from history of a servant leader, and indeed a courageous advocate, was a man called John Woolman. He was an American Quaker who lived through the middle of the 18th century. He helped rid the Religious Society of Friends of slaves. It is difficult to imagine Quakers as slaveholders, but many of the 18th century Quakers were affluent slaveholders. John Woolman set himself the goal to rid the Society of slaves. He didn't raise a big storm or start a protest. His method was one of gentle, persistent, persuasion- one person at a time. He travelled up and down the East coast, talking to slaveholders. Over a period of 30 years, he helped to rid slavery and the Quakers were the first religious group in America to formally denounce slavery.

We can make a difference today! Through our Socktober appeal, we will make a difference to those people in Manchester who do not have a home to stay in, food to eat, or other people to care and love them. We must remember the commandment that Jesus gave us: "A new commandment I give to you: love one another, as I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

We would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who has contributed to our Socktober appeal. People find themselves homeless due to many different reasons. Some of those reasons we have found out are:

- * People have lost their jobs and can't afford to pay for a house.
- * Some younger people have been made to leave their home.
- * Sometimes relationships break down.
- * There may be nobody left in their family to look after them.

We will be making up blessing bags from all the contributions and we will be taking them to the night shelter in Manchester every half term. We will also help set up and prepare the evening meal.

We would like to leave you with 2 questions:

- * What are you going to do differently as a result of what you have heard today?
- * How will you become a courageous advocate and a servant leader?

Amen