

Being Prepared to Step Forward

Rev Ben Arcus

Rev Arcus asked the boys at Chapel, who wanted chocolate and to come and get some – there was enough for 6 people.

After 6 boys took the chocolate, he observed who had taken the initiative to solve the problem of how to share it.

A friend of mine called Nigel told a really interesting story once that I've never forgotten. When he was at university, he and a friend wanted to go fishing on a lake in his friend's dingy that had a little outboard motor on it, and the motor had a few issues with it.

So they went out into the middle of this lake and started to cast out their lines, when they realised that water was starting to fill up the bottom of the boat. They realised that they had forgotten to put the bung in the boat, so the boat was going to fill up with water until it sunk if they didn't do something.

So the other guy tried to start the engine to get them back to shore, but the engine wouldn't start. So he took the cover off the engine so that he could try and fix it, but as he started to unwind some bolts, one of them fell into the water and sank.

Nigel didn't know anything about engines and he just sat in the boat and watched while his friend frantically tried to get the engine working. He eventually did and they managed to get the boat back to shore before it sank.

When they finally got into the car and were driving away, Nigel said the car was awkwardly silent. Eventually his friend turned to him, visibly annoyed and said: "You know, I could have done with some help back there."

Nigel then went on to talk about how he was someone who spent the early years of his life being passive and never really stepping forward because of his insecurity.

Being prepared to step forward is one of our pillars – it's something we understand as being important in the development of a person; to take initiative.

So why don't we? What stops us?

Well, fear and insecurity is one obvious thing. We are afraid that we might make a mistake or look stupid, or maybe we just don't want to stand out from the crowd and be noticed?

A lot of the time we think: "This isn't my responsibility – someone else will take care of it."

But when we all think like that, bad things can be allowed to happen:

Like the story of Kitty Genovese. Kitty was a 28-year-old woman who was coming home late from her job as a bartender, when she was attacked in the few metres between her car and the door of her apartment building, by a man who stabbed her in the back. She screamed out: “Oh my God he stabbed me, Help me!” and the attacker ran away. She made it to the entrance of the apartment building, but when, after 10 minutes, no one came to help Kitty, the attacker came back and killed her and robbed her, and left her to die.

When police eventually investigated the murder they found that 38 people had heard her cry for help that night, but had not done anything about it, assuming that someone else would.

This horrific event led to psychologists identifying something called the bystander effect – which is that people are less likely to offer help to a victim if other people are present.

We all have a part to play in making our world the kind of place it is meant to be. And it will only happen if people are prepared to step forward; if people see that something is wrong or something needs doing, and so realise that it is as much up to them to do something about it as anyone else.

So let's be prepared to step forward – when we see something happening that shouldn't be – teasing, bullying – anything that we know is not right – don't wait for someone else to do something. You don't need to put yourself in danger, but you should find help, or tell someone until the situation gets addressed.

So don't be a bystander, don't hide in the background, don't live a life of passivity and fear. Be prepared to step forward; then we will remake the world the way it is meant to be.