

## **BEING FRUITFUL AND PRODUCTIVE: 27<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY A**

Paul, an English doctor, has written about his experience of working in a dysfunctional hospital overseas. It had a bad reputation and patients didn't want to go there. The staff was always angry, bickering, and rude to the patients. Many came late to work. Some didn't come at all. Some came drunk.

As a result, the patients didn't get good service. Equipment seldom worked. When anyone tried to call the maintenance persons, no one answered. Or they couldn't come. Or they wouldn't. The pharmacy didn't have most of the medicines it was supposed to have. So when a doctor tried to get medicines for patients, they were never available, or only available if a bribe was handed over.

The laboratory had only a few tests that the technicians would do, even though they had the equipment for many more. The whole place was dirty and untidy. In fact, the total scene was one giant mess.

Then one day, the management called a meeting. It was a tense, horrible meeting. The chief executive explained that because of the very poor performance of the hospital, it was threatened with closure in six months' time. If that happened, everyone would lose their jobs.

Very quickly there was a change in the attitude of the staff. They didn't like to work, but what they did like was getting paid at the end of each month. Suddenly, people started coming to work on time, staying their full hours, and working hard and cheerfully. And almost immediately the whole atmosphere in the hospital changed. People were co-operative. Pieces of equipment were nearly always working when needed. Clinics worked efficiently. The pharmacy was well stocked with medicines. The laboratory did all its tests. Staff became very polite to patients.

Six months later, the management called another meeting. The CEO reported that the hospital had come within three days of closing. But now it had a reprieve and could continue. So management and staff threw a big party, pooled food and drink, and danced the night away.

So, what happened next? Did it slip back to the way it was before it was threatened with closure? Or did it stay good? A most pleasant surprise, Paul reports, is that it remained an efficient hospital.

At first the staff had made a big effort for one reason and one reason only. That was to save their jobs! But now that their jobs were safe, they discovered that they actually liked the feeling of being good workers in a good hospital with a good reputation. They now knew too exactly what it had taken to make their hospital good. It was a price they were prepared to keep on paying. So, just in time, they had learned what their lives as health workers was all about, and how a hospital exists to serve people.

We Christians like to think of ourselves as the new tenants of God's vineyard, God's people today. We have taken over from the old tenants, the scribes and Pharisees, the chief priests and the elders of the Jewish people. They failed to care properly for their people. They neglected, bullied and oppressed those in their care. They tortured and killed God's messengers, the prophets. They even rejected and killed Jesus, God's very own Son and greatest messenger. In short, they kept letting God down, turning their backs on God, and failing to produce the fruit that God expected from his vineyard.

What about us and our responsibilities and commitments? How fruitful and productive are our lives? How well are we caring for our people, the ones who are our responsibility and concern? How much time and attention are we giving them? How much do we put ourselves out to serve them? How strong is our love for them? How generous and unselfish are we towards them? Can we truly say that we have made other people the centre of our lives, just as Jesus, *'the man for others'* [Bonhoeffer], made his people the centre of his life? What have we done so far for Jesus and for the people in our care? What do we intend doing for him and others from now on? More immediately, in this coming week, how will our lives be more fruitful and productive?

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