

SERVICE OR SERVANTHOOD?

Today's Gospel reading certainly shows people are still people almost 2000 years later! Here are a couple of the disciples wanting a place in the coming kingdom - seats "*close to the action*" with positions of power. Jesus has been together with his disciples about three years now. They have seen miracles, healings, and heard His words, and yet here they are concerned about position. Then the other disciples get angry when they hear about James and John's request. This request has been made right after Jesus speaks to them about His death! Most of us would be wondering if Jesus is thinking "*what part of this don't you get?*" Yet, Jesus gathers all the disciples together and speaks about being the greatest, not in terms of power and position, but from a position of a servant. Jesus dismisses the world's view of power by using the example of the Gentiles who choose because of position and power to "lord it over those of lesser power and position.

Then Jesus makes a statement and I wonder if the disciples knew at the time the significance of it - "*for the son of man didn't come to be served, but rather to serve and to give his life as a ransom many people*". As disciples, followers of Jesus, He is our example. If we believe in Him, then it is reasonable to assume we practice His teachings.

But, what are the pitfalls, those things that can distract even take us away from following Him faithfully--simply to become more Christ-like?

Why is servanthood so important to our life and to ministry? Well, just consider the very negative consequences of selfish service as seen in the lives of Pharisees in Matthew 23:13. A self-serving kind of lifestyle is not only opposite to what the life, death, and message of the Jesus, but it brings division in the body of Christ.

Service that is self-serving simply cannot hold up under the pressures of a ministry and criticism that often go with the ministry. Eventually this kind of self-seeking service will crumble under criticism because it is more concerned about self and one's personal significance than with the needs of others. In fact, if we fail to find our worth in Jesus, we will become obsessed with gaining recognition from the wrong places. This obsession will often lead to burnout—to anger, bitterness, and a heart that is poisoned against any ministry in the future. It is God's desire for us to be in ministry our entire life!!! Remember the picture of the body and how each and every part is needed to function properly. Stewardship is emphasizing we are all an important piece of the puzzle here at Centennial.

In addition to verse 45 of today's reading there are a number of other verses that encourage us to serve one another. Listen to these words in Philippians 2:1-5 *“if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort provided by love, any fellowship in the spirit, any affection or mercy, complete my joy and be of the same mind, by having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one purpose. Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat **one another as more important than yourself each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but the interests of others as well.** You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had...”*

Can you imagine a church community operating that way and how that would show to others, life can be lived differently and have a very positive affect? It's the old school thing of “show and tell” -- we show them and then we tell them of God's influence on our lives. We don't have to stand on a soapbox with the largest Bible we can hold and shout scripture all day long.

If you are at all following politics we hear how people are frustrated and want someone real, which the “experts” say is why Donald Trump is so popular. However, I bring this up because many people are frustrated with their lives and where they are **not** going! I read numerous articles online of the bizarre things people are trying or involved with to add some mysterious element to make their lives complete and meaningful.

The way of life and its values in a Christian's life can provide that meaning, **but the one thing that will demonstrate this to people more than anything is our sincerity and authenticity by practicing servanthood.** John Wesley strongly believed that servanthood grew out of and from the relationship we have with Jesus Christ.

If we look back at the verses I read a short time ago from Philippians in the first verse - *“if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort provided by love, any fellowship in the spirit, any affection or mercy...”* **The point is there is encouragement in Christ, there is comfort provided by love, and fellowship in the ministry and power of the spirit** - the result—compassion and mercy that all believers should have for others, which is at the very heart of servanthood by definition. We must, however, always be on alert for problems that can hinder our serving.--**one being the reason why we serve,especially if it is to meet our own needs and have a sense of importance.**

Many people today, religious and non-religious, admire the latest Pope for his humility and the servanthood he displays. I believe high on the list of reasons we find it difficult to service is that when in such a place we are not comfortable. After all a whole travel industry thrives because they attempt to out serve the others in the industry! **It is not about you or me, it is all about the**

others!! Do we believe that? Because in our mission statement we state that we “make Christ known in our community..” That to me rings of servanthood.

We should be aware of those things that can hinder or make our servanthood less effective. A big pitfall is serving with a desire for status or to feel important. Remember that night in the Upper Room? No one picked up or took the towel from Jesus and in John 13:12-15, He washed the feet of all of them and told them He had given them an example and for them to do likewise.

We can falter in servanthood when we fall back on our own methods and take control, not relying on God, but taking up the methods of the world. We might have an idea of low self-worth that when we finally decide to serve we seek opinions of people rather than rest on the value God places on each and every one of us!

We can ignore servanthood, let others do it and search out happiness from the world. That mindset will short circuit the purpose and call on our life. There will be a lack of commitment leading to upside down priorities, leaving little or no time for God or for the body of Christ called Centennial.

Commercial time here— **soon a number of you will be asked to serve on committees so the church can continue to function. Will we be like the disciples when Jesus washed their feet and just sit there content to watch or be a servant?** I know for many of you, especially if you have been here a long time, might say “been there, done that”, but you have experience that is invaluable to those committees. We have a vast reservoir of knowledge here and if it is withheld what good is it doing? This is not meant as a guilt trip. At the heart of our faith is being that servant as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ went all the way to the cross – for you, me, and everybody out there!!! No one says servanthood is some glamorous and exciting event.

When there is a lack or absence of servanthood in the body of Christ a number of things can happen and they are not beneficial to a body of believers or others! Think back to the disciples in today's passages when they discovered James and John's request. There was jealousy, envy, disunity, and to follow – division. Jesus prevented the division by talking to all them about servanthood, it was the answer!!!

When servanthood is missing or lacking there is a failure to get involved in ministry. People want to be **ministered to** than **be equipped for ministry** to go out and serve. When we do not all function in the body those who are will burnout in an attempt to pull the load. We are a family, a community of faith and like any family by sharing the work, the work becomes lighter for everyone.

As I mentioned before when we don't live out our mission statement, our faith statement then we fail to use those gifts God has given us for the work of the church, why are we here? What are we doing?

Look at Ephesians 4:14-16 *“the purpose of this is to no longer be children, tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching by the trickery of people who with craftiness carry out their deceitful schemes. But practicing the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head. From Him the whole body grows, fitted and held together through every supporting ligament. **As each one does its part, the body grows in love**”* and I would add servanthood. In these verses there is a strong hint of maturity of no longer being children. Pride can be a powerful obstacle to overcome. Pride is also very powerful as mentioned in Galatians 5. Pride can get in the way of the work of the Holy Spirit.

How then do we live as a servant like Jesus Christ? Learning to live as a servant naturally begins by following the Lord. As believers who are to follow in the steps of our Savior, it is important that we focus on Him because He was and is the best example, He is our example of humility, maturity, and leadership. That really demonstrates servanthood.

Remember at the end of today's reading that **Jesus came to serve not be served. We are not Jesus Christ, but through the Holy Spirit within us, and the grace of God that John Wesley talked about so much, we can be that servant fulfilling our purpose and call on our life.** Just like Jesus we are on this earth for a time to do something and it is our task to discover that and do it.

When reading a book recently I came across this Methodist pledge, something I had not known about before this.

**I am but one, but I am one.
I cannot do much, but I can do something.
What I can do, I ought to do.
What I ought to do, I will do.**

Here are some more Methodist words, those of the three simple rules

"Do no harm, do good, stay in love with God."

May we all be servants of God and by the grace of God, daily, follow these words. Amen.