

“To Serve or Be Served?”—Mark 10:42-45

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “To Serve or Be Served?”, is Mark 10:42-45. *Jesus called them to Him and said to them, “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.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Isn't it great when you see a plan come together? After immeasurable time, energy and effort one of the most fulfilling feelings in the world is when something happens the way you want and your desired expectations are met. It becomes the cause for celebration and can even motivate you to continue serving. It may also cause others to take notice of your abilities to make a plan come together and “promote” you into areas of more leadership and responsibility. It's a basic concept of service in all vocations of life to which Jesus Himself alluded when He said: *One who is faithful in a*

very little is also faithful in much. (cf. Luke 16:10)

While serving others is truly what life should be about, it becomes a “slippery slope” in many respects. What does a person with a strong desire to serve do when the plan doesn’t come together according to expectation with the desired results? From a business perspective he certainly would not be viewed as an asset to the organization or company. He may view himself as a failure because his plan didn’t work and even shy away from serving in the future. You certainly would not hear him express the commonly stated encouragement for serving: “When you serve you get such a good feeling from helping others!”

In our text, Jesus spoke with His disciples about serving others in the context of organizational leadership. Jesus was surrounded by disciples who were concerned about which of them would be the greatest among them. While the fact that two of His disciples specifically requested places of authority next to Him may have prompted this teaching, earlier they all *had argued with one another about who was the greatest* (cf. Mark 9:34). At the same time, the request of James and John could have been prompted by Jesus’ statement to His disciples in Matthew 19:28 → *Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the*

twelve tribes of Israel. Sitting on the left and right sides of Jesus' throne could have been a logical request in light of this promise.

These discussions amongst the disciples display the struggles which so often come with serving others. When it comes to serving others it is natural to think about such service according to the ways and standards of the world around us. Consciously or unconsciously serving others flows from many forms of self-justification such as: Is it something which I feel comfortable doing? How much time and energy will it take? What's in it for me? Will I get recognition for it? Maybe doing this service will look good on my school or job resume. Is this service really necessary? Will the people I serve really appreciate my work? Many times commitment while serving is measured differently if I am "rewarded" by a paycheck or recognition in some fashion. In other words, according to the sinful ways and standards of the world around us, service is actually very self-serving and can create a paralysis of analysis.

Jesus brought a different perspective of service in His life and teaching, so radical that it seemed unfathomable or even ridiculous. In contrast to the world's ways of serving by exercising authority over others, Jesus says in verse 43 of our text: *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.*

Greatness for one of His disciples is measured not by the position you hold but rather by your willingness to *be slave of all*? The focus of a disciple of Jesus is not how you can *be served* but rather how you can *serve* others. This proves to be a real challenge for all people, Christians included.

It seems that our culture is governed by a perspective of “greatness” based upon functioning as a person with the reputation of integrity and contributing in a positive way into the lives of others.

What do you think the priority would be if parents across the country were asked about their desire for their children? Aside from being healthy and safe, would most say their priority is for their children to develop into adults who contribute positively into the lives of others while they get the best lives for themselves . . . or . . . to be servants of others?

Greatness from the world’s perspective could be summed up by the three P’s: **P**osition, **P**ossessions and **P**ower. **P**osition in life could include those advancements in education or job status which hold great power and responsibility and to which others aspire. “I wanna be king of the mountain!” **P**ossessions in life would include wealth in the form of both stuff and money, more and more of which is better. **P**ower in life would include the authority which you wield over others in the vocations you fulfill in life. Once again, while we can justify

serving others through these avenues of life, the devil, the world and our sinful natures still cause us to view such “service” in very self-centered, narcissistic ways. Even when it comes to a relationship with the LORD many view it as simply another way to be served with “the good life” on this earth.

Jesus places before us the true motivation for service—having been served **by Him**. He says in verse 45 of our text: *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.* The service which Jesus does for you goes much deeper than simply serving “the good life” for you physically. He gave *His life as a ransom for you!* How did He do this? More than simply setting an example of service, Philippians 2:6-8 says though Jesus *was in the form of God, He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* Jesus humbled Himself to suffer death on the cross for you. He was concerned first and foremost about what you need, not what you think you want.

Jesus came *to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.* A ransom is the price necessary to buy a person back from captivity. However, holding someone ransom is a fruitless endeavor without

love. The kidnapper could care less about his victim being held captive against his own will. He depends upon him being held captive against the will of someone one who loves the victim. The focus is on the victim being held captive against **the will of someone who loves him**. He depends upon it for payment. Otherwise the kidnapper will simply get rid of the one victim and find a different one **who is loved** by someone.

You were held captive in sin by the devil against the will of someone Who loves you with an eternal steadfast love—Yahweh. This is the impact of that familiar verse which we so easily quote: *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*. God has such an undying love for you that He gave His Son's life as the price to ransom you—to buy you back from the power of satan—and free you to worship, praise, thank and serve Him by serving others.

This means that your service is freed up from all the self-serving, selfish motives which haunt you every single day. They have been forgiven and have been removed from your service in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ! Your serving is sanctified—made holy before God—because Jesus gave *His life as a ransom for many*. *For many* also reminds you that you are serving those whom He Himself has served as well with His love and grace and forgiveness.

Focusing on Christ's humble work for you, through which the Holy Spirit works, frees you up, gifts you and empowers you to serve simply with the desire to be faithful to Him, all the while leaving the results to Him. Even though this service will be filled with burdens, trials, struggles, even suffering with temptations to lose heart and faith, your burden will be bearable as you trust in Christ to produce His work through unworthy, sinful, forgiven servants as you and I. Likewise, the Holy Spirit frees you to serve as you are served the forgiveness of sins regularly through the Gospel and sacraments. We do not serve because Jesus served us. We serve as Jesus serves us because it is His power, His Spirit, His work and His results. To God be the glory! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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