

The Rev. Duane A. Jesse, Senior Pastor
Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio
Weekend of Sunday, September 23, 2018
18th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 25/Proper 20/Year B
Primary Text: Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23
Sermon Title: “The Seven Faith Practices - Serve”

Theme

Jesus’ teaching and action in this text are directed to the church whenever it is seduced by the world’s definition of greatness: prestige, power, influence, and money. The antidote to such a concern for greatness is servanthood.

Text

³⁰[Jesus and the disciples went on] and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it;³¹for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” ³²But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

³³Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” ³⁴But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” ³⁶Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

Sermon

Even though Peter correctly confessed that Jesus was the Messiah in front of all the other disciples in last week's gospel reading, which according to Mark's Gospel was just a chapter before, and giving them a break because we get to look back through two thousand years of Christian history, you have to admit this story is confounding.

Jesus and his small band of disciples went from town to town and they pretty much just observed him preaching and teaching and performing amazing signs and miracles, and yet on this day, they both acknowledged that 1) they had no clue what Jesus, their leader, was talking about with regard to his morbid prediction, and 2) they debated among themselves which one of them (excluding Jesus I presume) was the greatest. Crazy! I know!

Jesus, who clearly knew what they were talking about, asked them what they were talking about, and instantly all of them were fascinated with their sandals.

Then he took that moment to tell them what was at the core of their discipleship in him. And what was at the core was ... servanthood. He said, and I quote, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."

I can think of no better segue to this third installment in our sermon series on the Seven Faith Practices. The Seven Faith Practices are seven verbs, seven actions that define the life of discipleship under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Each one of these Seven Faith Practices illustrated on the banners behind me were demonstrated by Jesus in his public ministry, and as you just heard him say in today's Gospel Reading, discipleship in him requires humility, not hubris.

Today we are examining the Faith Practice of Serve, and while I have said the last two weeks that the faithful disciple cannot pick and choose which one or two of the seven to practice, all are important to the disciple's life, Serve seems to have a special emphasis, and that is not just my thought, it's Jesus'. In just another chapter Jesus will tell his disciples, ^{Mark 10:45} "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve."

You see, it is as if servanthood was at the very core of who Jesus Christ, the Messiah of God, was and is. He said it, and he demonstrated it, and he expected

those who would dare to call themselves his disciples to do the same. It simply was and is that important. And one of my axioms on ministry is, “If it’s important to Jesus then it ought to be important to us.”

In a moment Flower Azary and Claudia Bair will join me in a discussion of the many opportunities Zion provides for us to serve. There is no question about it, the Serve Table is our biggest and most active table. And that is as it should be.

When you hear the word “serve,” what come to mind? Do you think of someone bringing you food at a restaurant? Does it remind you of working at Food Distribution? Or do you think of someone who brought you food when you were at home recovering from an illness or surgery? Using Christ’s life as the model, this Faith Practice shows us how we can respond in loving service to our neighbors, our community, and the world.

And Christ-centered service is often transformational. Service to another can break your heart and move your theology, however refined it is, to praxis. In all my years of doing Make a Difference projects, and JOSHUA House, and Youth Week of Service, the Service Day of NYG, and God’s Work Our Hands or any of the other projects the churches I have been a member of taken on, I have never once heard a person say that serving in one of those serve opportunities was a waste of their time.

Service is a living witness to our faith that provides opportunities for us to invite others to learn more about Jesus. When the little church up north would do a “Make a Difference” project (that was before God’s Work Our Hands” was a thing, people would drive by and honk and wave or stop by and thank us for cleaning up a neighbor’s house. The same thing happened down Canfield Road a few years ago when we cleaned up someone’s yard. And this past June along with 31,000 other Lutherans, we were recognized and appreciated wherever we went because no one has ever seen so many people under one banner descend upon a city like we Lutherans do. And sometimes it’s not just thanks and appreciation, but sometimes it is the question, “Why are you doing this?” And they don’t mean, the thing we are doing, they mean, “Why are you, taking your time and spending your money to help out this person you don’t even know?” That’s when we get to tell them, “Because I am a disciple of Jesus Christ and he said we ought to serve, and so I am here, serving.”

Now I would like to invite Flower and Claudia up to tell you, or remind you of all the ways your church offers you to serve.

Faith Practice of Serve by Flower Azari and Claudia Bair

The purpose of the serve table is to extend Christian compassion and helpfulness to the aged, under privileged, and all in need of aid, be it body and soul in the church, our surrounding community, nationally, or worldwide.

"Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received." (1 Peter 4:10)

Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back." (Luke 6:38)

- **Protestant Family Services** - Is funded through groups, organizations and churches in the area and collects and distributes school supplies for local students, teachers, and schools.
- **Sharing Tree** – Ask members to purchase gifts to less fortunate children at Christmas.
- **Thanksgiving Dinner** - Serves a meal to local community individuals.
- **Red Door Cafe** - Prepares and serves meals at St. John's Episcopal Church.
- **Kitchen**
- **Crop Walk**
- **Property** – Electrical; plumbing; security; paint; carpet; maintenance; indoor/outdoor property; plant ladies; event setup; landscaping.
- **Bereavement** - Provides fellowship meal following funerals and memorial service.
- **Buck - A – Chick** - Color numerous chicks for a buck for Lutheran World Relief. This part of God's Global Barnyard project. Provides farm animals to communities around the world.
- **Coffee Hour** - Setting up coffee and drinks in the fellowship hall.
- **Food Distribution** - Serves more than 125 families representing 270 Individuals monthly with groceries at the end of the month

- **"GOD'S WORK OUR HANDS"** - Yearly nationwide project through ELCA on the first weekend after Labor Day where we Lutherans volunteer to be a visible sign of God's grace in the community.
- **Salvation Army** - Ring the bell for the Salvation Army, at the Sparkle Market in Cornersburg.

Five Takeaways

1. If serving is important to Jesus, it ought to be important to us.
2. Serving is one of the ways we live out our lives of discipleship.
3. The Serve Table has many responsibilities.
4. There are many ways to serve; there is something for everyone.
5. You will be blessed when you serve.

As baptized believers, we are called to live our lives as servants of God. Scripture, like today's Gospel Reading, frequently remind us that as Christians we are to serve others, work for justice and live in community with our neighbors, even those who are different than us. The culture tries to tell us that race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, politics, economic class, education level, generation or whatever else should divide us. But as Christians we know that every living thing is a creation of the God we worship. We are all part of God's family. "You belong here. We belong together."

Last week, as we explored the Faith Practice of Encourage, each of you were given a simple bracelet with those words, "You belong here. We belong together." And I told you that I wanted you to wear it facing you so that you could read it as encouragement all week. You are a part of something much bigger than yourself, and here you are family; here you have value; here you are loved.

Now I want you to take it off that bracelet and turn it around so that when you reach out to serve another or simply greet another, it is able to be read by them. And if they ask you can tell them, "Others may want to point out our differences, but I know that every living thing is a creation of the God we worship. We are all part of God's family. "You belong here. We belong together.'"