

February 15, 2009 Service

The late, renowned Christian physician and missionary, Albert Schweitzer once said, "I do not know what your destiny may be, but this one thing I know, that no one of you will ever be truly happy until [you] have sought and found how [you] may serve."

Will you be loyal to the church and uphold it by your Prayers, Presence, Gifts, Service and Witness?

Today, we are going to concentrate on Service. Many of you are so dedicated to serving the church and availing yourselves for the physical labor of the church. You have spent seemingly endless hours here caring for the edifice, cleaning, building, and repairing. This lovely facility would not exist but for your love and care. You have given of yourselves as Liturgists, Ushers, Pianists, Choir members, Teachers, Leaders and the Lord knows how many other important things you have accomplished. You have also served the Lord with your hearts; really ministered to one another and the world. You have cared for the sick, the dying and provided refuge to the faint of heart. Many of you over the years have worn multiple hats at one time, right? I say today, Thank You.

Acknowledging all of that service, is your work complete? Have you stretched to include all the ways you have been called to serve? And right now some of you are saying a strong “Yes” to that question. Again, Thanks, but I believe there is more ahead.

Sometimes our service is easy isn't it, second nature and something we like to do. At other times, serving God and one another is a real test, especially if cross words and hurt feelings get involved. And, unfortunately, like any other family, sometimes dumb stuff gets said or done. It is in those times when we have to suck it up and be the best example of a Christ filled life we can be whichever side of the hurt we are on. Our service to one another can't be haughty or arrogant but must be from a humble heart that we do and lead; praying that the hurts will be healed in a godly manner.

On what we celebrate as Maundy Thursday, Jesus gathered with his Disciples to share the Passover Meal. In a manner that no one expected, Jesus showed his humility and his example for what it means to serve one another. In John's account we read:

JN 13:1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

JN 13:2 The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. <sup>3</sup> Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; <sup>4</sup> so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. <sup>5</sup> After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

JN 13:6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

JN 13:7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

JN 13:8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."  
Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

JN 13:9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

JN 13:10 Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." <sup>11</sup> For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

JN 13:12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. <sup>13</sup> "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. <sup>16</sup> I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

JN 13:18 "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.'

JN 13:19 "I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He. <sup>20</sup> I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me."

JN 13:21 After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me."

JN 13:22 His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. <sup>23</sup> One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. <sup>24</sup> Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means."

JN 13:25 Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?"

JN 13:26 Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. <sup>27</sup> As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

"What you are about to do, do quickly," Jesus told him, <sup>28</sup> but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. <sup>29</sup> Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. <sup>30</sup> As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

Even knowing that Judas was going to betray him, Jesus went forward and included him in his act of love and service.

There are times when we just feel worn out, struggling to do the work of the church. It can happen even when we are having a close and growing relationship with God. There are times when we have nothing left to give and feel burned out. It is then that the tasks at hand can become a real drag. However, we are spurred on as were the people of Galatia as we read Paul's words from Galatians 6:9-10, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

What does it mean, really, for you and I to serve or support the church with our “service”? As we serve our Master and King does it mean that we do just what it takes, leaving that work to the minimal time we can allot? Does it mean that we do just what it takes to get by? I think that in our weariness sometimes that is all that is left, especially if we don’t walk a close walk with God. We try to fit his work in after the rest of the things we have to do instead of putting his work, along with our tithes first. I have discovered for myself that if I do His work first, the rest falls into place and I don’t mean just the shepherding of his flock.

Like tithing, Service is a matter of practice. When our tasks become difficult and we find ourselves challenged, it is helpful to remember for whom we are working. It is unlikely that any of us here will feel the real fires of persecution for our love and service to Jesus Christ but like those early disciples, thousands do today and yet remain faithful, doing the Lord’s work even in the harshest conditions. The Apostle Paul wrote several of the New Testament Letters while either under House Arrest or while imprisoned for sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is possible that many of those letters would have never been written that to this day guide the church if he hadn’t been forced to get off the road for a while. We never know how God is going to use us, in what situation.

As we travel this journey of life together, have you settled into a comfortable place, a comfort zone with your service to God and this faith

community? Have you availed yourself to the movement of God's spirit in your inner being, that place where you feel God nudging you? Are you looking for God led ways to serve where you can experience new growth and wonder; a deeper relationship with Him? It is my hope and prayer that as you draw closer to the Lord you might find a deep seated desire to serve him here in the local church and in the world around us. Remembering just how much God has loved us can help.