

February 28 2020

John 13:14-15

Galatians 5:13

“GPS Series: Serve One Another”

At the 2009 annual meeting of the American Heart Association in Orlando Florida, 300,000 doctors, nurses, and researchers met in Atlanta to discuss, among other things, the importance a low-fat diet plays in keeping our hearts healthy. Well, at this huge conference it was discovered that during mealtimes these advocates of heart health consumed fat-filled fast food such as bacon cheeseburgers and fries at about the same rate as people attending other kinds of conventions. One cardiologist who was caught in the midst of downing a Big Mac was asked whether or not he thought his partaking in high-fat meals like that set a bad example. He replied, "Not me, I took my name tag off." I guess the moral of this story is, "Either live up to your name tag or take it off!"

We all have a name tag and that name tag is Christian. That name means that we are striving to be like Jesus. Our first scripture passage for today comes from John 13. It is a section where Jesus washes his disciples' feet and then proclaims, "14 - Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 - I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." There are denominations where this act is performed with the same frequency and carries the same weight as communion. Now, I don't think that this act of washing feet carried such weight in Jesus' eyes. But the act of serving one another did. Serving one another became so important to the early church that Paul would write the following words to the Galatian church in 5:13, "Serve one another in Love."

The fact is we need servant role models to follow these days because a genuine servant mind set is so very rare in our fallen world. Rick Warren writes, "The world defines greatness in terms of power, possessions, prestige, and position. If you can demand service from others, you've arrived. In our self-serving culture with its me-first mentality, acting like a servant is not a popular concept."

Now the reason being a servant is not popular is because it is so contrary to our inborn selfish sinful nature. In our minds our tendency is to yearn to be first not last. We want to be served not to serve. As Bill Hybels says, "In each human heart is a built-in mechanism that craves self-promotion and advancement." Well, Jesus taught that in His kingdom true greatness is not a measure of self-will but rather self-abandonment. Our Lord said that the more you lose the more you gain. The last shall be first and the first shall be last. Our Lord taught that the truly great people the people we should admire and emulate are those who humble themselves and serve others.

I want to draw us all back to the days following September 11, 2001. In her book entitled *A Heart, A Cross And A Flag*, syndicated columnist and former presidential speech-writer, Peggy Noonan tells a remarkable story. She says that on the first weekend after 9-11 she drove to Lower Manhattan to witness the relief effort taking place at Ground Zero. When she arrived she said she found herself focusing on a convoy of trucks filled with rescue workers coming off their 12-hour shifts. The men in the trucks were construction and electrical workers, police, emergency medical workers, and firemen. In other words, it was a procession of the not-so-rich-and-famous. Nonetheless, during those

dark days following the 9-11 attacks, these blue collar New Yorkers were celebrities in a human drama more significant than any Broadway act. Noonan joined the growing crowd of onlookers cheering the workers as they passed by with shouts of "God bless you!" and "We love you!" They clapped and blew kisses. Noonan writes:

"I looked around me at all of us who were cheering. And I saw who **we** were. Investment bankers! Orthodontists! Magazine editors! In my group, a lawyer, a columnist, and a writer. We had been the kings and queens of the city, respected professionals in a city that respects its professional class. But on this night we were nobody. We were so useless, all we could do was applaud the somebodies, the workers who, unlike us, had not been applauded much in their lives. I was so moved and, oddly I guess, grateful. Because they'd always been the people who ran the place, the people who kept it going; they'd just never been given their due."

Well, I think this atypical reversal that Noonan witnessed in New York that day is a good illustration of this Christian principle. You see, Jesus taught that in His kingdom, servanthood is deemed a virtue not a punishment. He also said repeatedly that, as His children, we should follow His example and serve one another.

In Matthew 20:26-7 Jesus said, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

This morning I want to briefly cite five very basic characteristics of true Christian servants, qualities that we should expect every Christian to exemplify. And as I review

them I want to us all to understand that being a servant is not something that should be limited to people who hold some leadership role in the church. In Galatians 5:13-14 Paul reminds us that all Christians are to "serve one another in love." He goes on to say, "The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." By the way, these characteristics of servants are found in Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, on days 33 and 34, so this will be a review for many of us who have studied that book.

First, genuine Christian servants think of ministry as an opportunity more than an obligation. They actually enjoy helping people in Jesus' name. They obey Psalm 100:2 and "serve the Lord with gladness" because experience has taught them the joy that ministry to others brings. Their relationship with Jesus and their obedience to His command has led them to understand that serving is in fact one of the highest uses of this life of ours. They are like the poverty-stricken Christians in the church in Macedonia who sincerely wanted to give to help the believers in Jerusalem. Remember? In 2nd Corinthians 8:3-4 Paul said, "I can testify that the Macedonians [gave] because they wanted to, and not because of any nagging on my part. They begged us to take the money so they could share in the joy of helping." Christlike servants like these Macedonians love to serve because they know that when they see a need what they are really seeing is a chance to join God in His work, a chance to do things that literally make an eternal difference. So, when they see someone who is hurting or lonely, they seize the moment and work to help that person. In this way they obey the teaching of Galatians 6:10 where it says, "Whenever we have the opportunity, we have to do what is good for everyone, especially for the family of

believers." In his classic book, *A Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster distinguishes between genuine Christ-like service and what he calls "self-righteous service." He says, "Self-righteous service is temporary. It functions only while the specific acts of service are being performed. Having served it can rest easy. True service is a life-style. It acts from ingrained patterns of living. It springs spontaneously to meet human need."

And Foster is absolutely right. Genuine Christian servants love to serve so they are always on the lookout, always sensitive to need, seeing it as an opportunity to further the Kingdom of God.

John Wesley is a good example of this principle. His motto in life was, "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can." That's true greatness always eagerly looking for opportunities to help others.

Secondly, servants think more about others than they do about themselves. They understand and obey the teaching of Philippians 2 where it says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." In other words, their attitude is to be selfless rather than selfish. As Andrew Murray once put it, "The humble person is not one who thinks meanly of himself; he simply does not think of himself at all."

President Ulysses S. Grant was once on the way to a reception in his honor in the days before television allowed everyone near-instant recognition of the presidential face. He was caught in a rain shower and ended up sharing his umbrella with a stranger who was

going to the reception as well. The stranger said to Grant, "I have never seen President Grant and I merely go to satisfy a personal curiosity. Between you and me I have always thought that Grant was a very much overrated man." Grant replied, "That's my view also." Well, like President Grant, genuine servants are not conceited. They are humble in that they are self-forgetful. They understand what it means to "lose their lives" in service to others.

A third characteristic of Christian servants is this—they do every task with equal dedication. Whenever they serve, however they serve, they follow the command in Colossians 3:23 and "do it with all their heart." They work this way because in their way of thinking the size of the task is irrelevant, so they gladly serve even in mundane ways. And once again they follow the example of the Son of God Himself, who specialized in menial tasks that everyone tried to avoid: washing the dirty feet of His disciples, helping children, fixing breakfast, and serving lepers. Nothing was beneath Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, the Creator and Redeemer of this world. Foster says, "Self-righteous service is impressed with the 'big deal.' It enjoys serving when the service is titanic. But, true service finds it almost impossible to distinguish the small from the large service." Rick Warren writes, "Small tasks often show a big heart. Your servant's heart is revealed in little acts that others don't think of doing. Great opportunities often disguise themselves in small tasks."

This leads to a fourth basic characteristic of Christian Servants. They keep a low profile. In other words, they don't promote or call attention to themselves. They are more

than content to know that only God sees the way they serve others. As Paul put it in Galatians 1:10, "If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ." Foster says, "Self-righteous service requires external rewards. It needs to know that people see and appreciate the effort. It seeks human applause. True service is not like that. It rests contented in hiddenness. The divine nod of approval is completely sufficient."

We should all remember that serving in order to impress people was the sin of the Pharisees. They turned helping others, giving, and even prayer into a performance. Jesus hated this attitude and warned "When you do good deeds, don't try to show off. If you do, you won't get a reward from your Father in Heaven." (Matthew 6:1) Genuine servants, the kind we should all emulate, know this so they don't serve for the approval and applause of others. They live for an audience of One.

Finally, and most importantly, genuine servants base their identity in Jesus. Our relationship with Jesus needs to be our source of significance. You see only secure people can serve. As I alluded a moment ago, insecure people are always worrying about how they appear to others. The more insecure you are the more you will want people to serve you and the more you will need their approval. Henri Nouwen said, "In order to be of service to others we have to die to them; that is to say we have to give up measuring our meaning and value with the yardstick of others only then are we free to be compassionate." When you base your identity on your relationship with Christ, you are freed from the expectations of others, and that allows you to serve them best. Bill Hybels refers to this principle of spiritual maturity and says, "God promises, 'Lose your selfish ambition; I will

honor you for loving others. Lose your addiction to things; I will provide for you if you seek Me wholeheartedly. Lose your obsession to be in control; I will give you power as you follow Me. Lose your appetite for thrills; I will startle you with pleasures you could never have found on your own. Lose your life; I will give you eternity."

We close now with a song of commitment to encourage us all to follow Jesus' example and commit to a life of servanthood. Let this be a time when each of us pledges to do all we can to serve one another. But if you have another commitment to make we invite you to make it public at this time. Perhaps you need to respond by giving your life to Jesus professing publicly that you have asked Him to forgive you and take control of your heart and life. Or you may feel led to commit to become a part of this church moving your membership here to this place. Whatever decision you have to make, I invite you to walk this aisle and share it with me right now as we stand and sing.