

Servant of All
Mark 10:35-45

October 21, 2018 – Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

As I read today's scripture about James and John requesting positions of glory, I was reminded of a clergy friend. My friend, who could truly be called a saint of the church, died this past August. (I've lost a lot of friends this past year, and I'm told that is a sign of aging. "As you get older, you attend more funerals," people tell me.) But I was a lay person and in a leadership position in my local church in the 1990's when my friend was appointed its pastor. I distinctly remember having lunch with this pastor and having him tell me, "Mark, when I die, I don't want something named after me. I don't want a room or a hall or a building named after me." That has stuck with me, as he expressed his humility.

For me, it was a real learning moment. Most of us really want to be remembered after we die; and we would love to have a building named after us. But my friend was saying that it's all about God. It's not about us. We serve to further God's kingdom, not for our own glory.

Most of us have been in an employment position where it was primarily our job to make our boss look good. I personally can cite multiple times when I did a lot of hard work. If I was lucky, my boss would say "Thank You," but he would take all the credit from upper management, despite the fact that he only passed the work on to me. And maybe that's the way the system works, but it's not always an easy position to accept.

Those familiar with the academic environment are well aware of the situation where professors will have graduate assistants do a major amount of research for a book that the professor is writing. At the time the book is published, if the grad assistants are lucky, they are mentioned on an introductory page, but often times, not.

Well, my friends, that's the story of Christianity. Jesus tells James and John, "It's not your place to receive the glory. It's your place to serve." And lest we think this unfair, Jesus goes on to say, "The Son of Man did not come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people."

Now, as I say all this, don't hear me saying that I think it wrong to remember the departed. I believe those memories are a wonderful thing; and I think naming things or dedicating things to the honor of loved ones is a wonderful way to further those memories. Having said that, I don't think we should serve the church, serve God, or serve God's people for personal glory. We serve for the glory of God. We give to the glory of God; and even when we lift up others; we do it to the glory of God.

Many of you know that I am on the Board of Directors of OhioGuidestone. Several years ago, that Development Director learned that Ginny and I have named OhioGuidestone in our will. (By the way, we have also named the church in our

will; and I hope the church is in your will as well, at least for a small percentage of your estate.) Anyway, the Development Director came to me asking if he could do a newsletter article about our decision to leave a portion of our estate to OhioGuidestone. I had very mixed feelings about this. Initially, I told him, “No. We did not do this for public recognition. This is between us and God.” But the Development Director went on to explain, “You can serve as an example to others. This would be good for the agency.” I replied, “Let me think about it.” By the way, the article never happened; but we are listed on reports as members of the Legacy Society.

Jesus states that he did not come to earth to be served, but to serve. Some of our liturgy states that God humbled God’s self, taking on human form, to come into ever closer relationship with us. God took on human form to walk with us, to teach us, to heal us, and ultimately to die for us. Indeed, Jesus came to earth to serve. The earthly Jesus never sought glory; and the earthly Jesus was never glorified, at least not until Easter Sunday – the day of resurrection; and, oh yes, I also need to exclude the transformation; but remember, he told Peter, James and John not to tell anyone about it. Friends, there is no glory in being stripped naked, nailed to a cross, and hung in a public place to die; and that was the fate of Jesus.

But then comes Easter. Indeed, be it not for Easter, the story of Jesus would be very dark. The story of the passion and death is a very dark story. But I tell you, Jesus did not come to earth only to die. Oh, I know all of the Atonement Theologies – beliefs of how Jesus took our place on the cross or how Jesus bought our salvation through his suffering and death. But I tell you, that greatest news is not in the crucifixion, but in the resurrection. Indeed, the greatest news in the Gospel is Jesus promise in the last verse of Matthew – “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Indeed, God took on human form to further our relationship with God. Jesus came to earth that we might know God in an up-close, and personal way. But then, Jesus tells each of us, you and me, that relationship will never end. Christ is with us always, and always means always. And that’s the greatest gift the world has ever known.

So where does this all leave us? Friends, today we begin our 2018 Stewardship Campaign. Over the course of the next three weeks, you’ll be asked to consider your service to God; and speaking generally, that service takes two forms: Time and Money. I’ve said before that I believe each of us is called to give of our time. If your relationship with this church is limited to Sunday Morning between 10:30 and 11:45 a.m., I hope you are actively doing some soul-searching, actively asking yourself and actively asking God in prayer how you can serve. It may be through teaching Sunday School, or being involved in the music program. It may be working with our outreach or nurture committees. It may be cooking or serving or cleaning-up for community meals. It may be helping with our Laura’s Home meal, or collecting or distributing food for Harvest Partners. It may be joining the

Stephen Ministers. It may be working with our youth or going on a mission trip. And, it just may be a ministry that no one here has ever thought of before, something entirely new. I welcome new ideas; and I welcome the people to put new ideas in place.

As I stated last week, I also believe that each of us is called to give of our money. Yes, God has truly blessed each of us. Even the poorest among us is very well off compared to 50% of the world's population that earns less than six dollars per day. And so, I challenge each of us to figure out the percentage of your income that you give to the church. The Biblical mandate is 10% which is considered a tithe. Now, I'm not suggesting that you suddenly make a huge jump to 10%. I would not even recommend that, unless you have a whole lot of discretionary income. What I am suggesting is that you work toward that 10%, increasing your giving by a percent or two or whatever you are able to do without placing a significant hardship on yourself. Neither God nor your church wants you to be in hardship. If you're truly giving all you can, please don't overextend yourself. I also need to say, if you are extremely blessed, if you are currently giving 10%, and you are able to do more, 10% should not be seen as a limit.

Finally, I promise you personally, as the primary administrator of this church and as an elder in the East Ohio Conference; whatever you give will be put to good use. None of your money will be wasted.

Indeed, we serve God as we serve our fellow brothers and sisters; and we serve with our time and our money; and it is a joy to serve, as we give God all the praise and all the glory. Thanks be to God for the opportunities to give and the opportunities to serve.

Let us pray. . .

Lord, we thank you and we praise you,
for the many and rich blessing you have given us.
My we use every blessing, all of our resources,
to be a blessing to others,
as we give you all the glory.

Amen.

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