

“Sent to Serve”

John 13:12-17 and Philippians 2:1-15

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John 13:12-17

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am.

So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Philippians 2:1-15

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God,

 did not regard equality with God
 as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,

 taking the form of a slave,
 being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,
 he humbled himself

 and became obedient to the point of death—
 even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him
 and gave him the name
 that is above every name,

so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.

Sermon

One of the “slogans” of the Presbyterian Church is: **“We are saved to serve.”** One way this is expressed in scripture is in Paul’s letter to the Church at Ephesus:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works; so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” (Ephesians 2:8-10)

If that wasn’t enough, one of our church’s catechisms asks:
“What is the chief end (the chief purpose) of humanity?”

The answer: “To glorify God and enjoy God forever.” To glorify God is to serve.

Of course, you may be thinking, “This is old news.” We know this. We already do this.

I think for me, it is always good to ask and “re-ask” the questions of **why** we serve, **how** we serve, and **whom** we serve.

Beyond the scriptures, slogan, and catechism question and answer I’ve already mentioned, the matter of **WHY** we serve is important to keep at the forefront of our minds. Ideally, we serve not for the credit we will receive from others, the attention that will be showered upon us, or in order to receive “repayment” from those we serve. We also don’t serve others to exert pressure or control over them. We don’t serve to manipulate people or to attempt to manipulate God.

Serving God does not earn us points. There is no point system with God. Serving doesn't secure our salvation. Only Jesus could do that, and he has done it in full.

So why bother with living a life of servanthood? Because this is what we were created for. Remember: we are **created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.** Rather than service being onerous, we can look upon our lives with excitement thinking: "What good works has God prepared for me to do today?" It allows us to look at interruptions and inconveniences that we encounter as opportunities for service when we trust God's promise that God has prepared this to be **our way of life**. It invites us to begin each day or each time we sit down to plan our day to joyfully ask God: "What have you prepared for me to do today?"

Why do we serve? "We have been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."

How do we serve? In our scripture from Philippians, we heard one of the more challenging and profound passages in the Bible. "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus . . ." **And what was the mind of Christ?**

"He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of slave, became human. It was an incredibly humbly process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless life and then died a selfless, obedient death – and the worst kind of death at that – a crucifixion." (Philippians 2:5-8, *The Message*)

Christlike servanthood requires that we do not cling to the advantages and the privileges of status. It requires humility. It requires dying to self and living for God and others. To serve can be painful.

When we serve others in love, we grow to love them. To walk with others on difficult paths can unite us with others in their pain. It is to know the pain of helplessness at times – of realizing at times that all we can do is to be present and to pray. To serve is to acknowledge that we cannot fix things – at least not all things.

Often when we choose to serve others, we are instead choosing to "fix them." We serve from a position of superiority. We know more, we've made better decisions, we work harder, we know the RIGHT way people

should be, and we know the RIGHT things people should do. If we approach serving others with the mindset of “fixing others,” we are not serving from a place of humility but from a place of power, privilege, and judgmentalism.

HOW are we to serve? With the mind and heart of Christ.

WHOM do we serve? We should be open to serving anyone whom God calls us to serve . . . anyone whom God puts in our our pathway . . . This also includes doing those acts of service that are not directly touching another human, but which affect others in a positive way. It includes those acts of service often done in the background which allow other ministries and good works to happen. These acts of service are often unacknowledged, but they are important “good works,” which God created in Christ to be our way of life.”

Whom do we serve? As we remember Jesus washing his disciples’ feet long ago, we learn that we serve those who need us to serve them. We serve people who may never say thanks, we serve people who may misunderstand our service, we serve people who may betray or deny us or speak unkindly about us (as Christ’s disciples did after he served them). We serve people who may never serve us. Jesus came not to be served but to serve. He calls us to the same: to serve more than to be served.

However, a friend of mine reminded me recently that giving others an opportunity to serve us when we are in need is a way we can serve them. I had said to her: “I haven’t called much because I haven’t wanted to burden you with my problems when you are grieving the death of your husband (which was more than a year ago.) She said, please continue to tell me your burdens. You are giving me an opportunity to serve and not to just be served. This is also a good reminder for us all.

God calls us, God equips us, and God sends us to SERVE. I pray we will not experience this as an onerous calling; rather, that we would experience this as a great gift from God. We are saved to serve. We are called to glorify and enjoy God forever.

Why do we serve? Because God first served us. Christ first served us. God created us for service to be our way of life.

How do we serve? With love, dignity, humility, respect. We are to love with the heart and mind of Jesus.

Whom do we serve? All people whom God places in our paths.

We hear the call which Isaiah heard once again: Whom shall I send? Who will go for me? Here we are, Lord. Send us.