

## **Service is Not Optional**

Mark 10:35–45

### **Introduction- Illustration**

I have to admit to the fact that I am something of a political “junkie”. From way back in the 1957 when John Diefenbaker was first elected Prime Minister (I was only 8 at the time) I have been interested in politics. Certainly one of the most colourful and influential politicians of the last century was British war time P. M. Winston Churchill. He had a way of motivating people to serve and “never give up”. The story regarding Churchill is told:

“During World War II, England needed to increase its production of coal. Winston Churchill called together labour leaders to enlist their support. At the end of his presentation he asked them to picture in their minds a parade which he knew would be held in Picadilly Circus (junction of five busy streets has been a famous *London* Landmark) after the war.

First, he said, would come the sailors who had kept the vital sea lanes open. Then would come the soldiers who had come home from Dunkirk and then gone on to defeat Rommel in Africa. Then would come the pilots who had driven the Luftwaffe from the sky.

Last of all, he said, would come a long line of sweat-stained, soot-streaked men in miner's caps. Someone would cry from the crowd, 'And where were you during the critical days of our struggle?' And from ten thousand throats would come the answer, 'We were deep in the earth with our faces to the coal.'"

Don McCullough, *Waking from the American Dream*.

Serving God by serving others is very often not glorious or glamorous but it is what we as Christians are called to do and by no less person than our Lord Himself. Turn with me to our text Mark 10: 35-45.

***Mark 10:35-45 (New International Version)***

## ***The Request of James and John***

**35**Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

**36**"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

**37**They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

**38**"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

**39**"We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, **40**but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

**41**When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. **42**Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **43**Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, **44**and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. **45**For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

This is a familiar portion to many of us and like the ten disciples we become "indignant" with James and John. The problem is that in our negative reaction to James and John we can easily miss the very important teaching that Jesus presents to the group in the wake of this foolish question from the "sons of thunder".

In the verses just prior to this portion Jesus had told His disciples that shortly He was going to **suffer**, to **die** and then to be **raised to life** again. So it is in this context that He teaches them this important Christian principle of **servicing others** and not just to them but to all who would be "Christ followers". For us in a culture where "the winners" are the ones we honour these words of Jesus are radical. **"...whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to first must be a slave to all."** Most in our

culture operate on the premise that holds **"looking out for number one"** is the highest wisdom. Since that is true the Christian that lives his or her life by the principle that Jesus taught here is nothing less than **"counter cultural"**.

Jesus makes it **very clear** that for His disciples (then and now) putting others first and **servicing is not an option** it is the only way to live.

In Rick Warren's book The Purpose Driven Life (which many of us have read) Purpose Four of the "five life purposes" is "You Were Shaped For Serving God." Warren challenges every Christian by proclaiming: "You were put on earth to make a contribution." We "weren't created just to consume resources..." God designed us to make a difference with our lives. "We are healed to help others. We are blessed to be a blessing. We are saved to serve, not to sit around and wait for heaven."

We know our salvation is dependent on God's grace, not on whether the good works we do outweigh the inevitable accumulation of bad deeds we are responsible for. However, as Warren puts it, we **"are not saved by service, but [we] are saved for service."**

There are many reasons why you and I need to serve others (**to become servants**) and we will look at four of them this morning.

### **Firstly serving promotes unity.**

The dictionary defines unity as "being united or combined into one, as of the parts of a whole". We who are part of Christ body have been "combined into one" in Him Who is our Saviour.

Jesus said (John 17:23) *"I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete **unity** to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."*

To a degree at least **we know what unity is** but how are we **"brought"** to the place where we have it. The great American preacher A.W. Tozer said "the foundation of unity is humility". Jesus taught...

### **Matthew 23:11-12 (New International Version)**

**11***The greatest among you will be your servant. 12***For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.**

If you are not humble when you serve, if you are arrogant, then your service is a waste. So use your gifts, whatever they are, to His glory. Look for ways to invest in the people of this church, to invest in your neighbours. Be a servant in your neighbourhood, in your school in your work and in your play. **Invest in others without being asked.** Your labours of love count eternally. Investing in others as you serve them builds unity within our church or our neighbourhood.

At WEFC and as Christians in Winnipeg we should look for ways to productively use our resources whatever they are and wherever we are, to build His Kingdom. In serving to His Glory we will **build unity.**

### **Second serving fosters teamwork.**

Probably at no time during the 10 years we have attended WEFC was there a stronger sense of teamwork than when we were constructing this building. Some in our church have great abilities when it comes to construction – Others (like me) not so much! But serving together (regardless of the skill level) built a real sense of teamwork. The same is true for those who having taken part in mission projects, the Habitat “build” and many other places where we have served together.

In order to be “salt and Light” to the world we are to use our gifts wherever we are, in whatever way possible, to serve those in need. Peter tells us ...

### **1 Peter 4:10&11 (New International Version)**

<sup>10</sup>*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. <sup>11</sup>If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever.*

But you might say "I don't feel gifted" to teach Sunday School or to do maintenance to church property. Bill Hybels says "...spiritual gifts are less 'something we figure out ahead of time' than something God reveals to us as we serve... (so don't worry about being gifted) Drape the servant's towel over your arm and get busy."

Serving inspires others. It acts as a catalyst that generates teamwork and in the process still more acts of serving. Serving together adds the "glue" necessary to bond a relationship. Service is an expression of grace to someone, an undeserved gift that we give to others; it is a snapshot of the gospel. Service is the language of grace.

When we serve together, we realize how much we need each other.

**Serving fosters teamwork**

### **Thirdly servicing imitates Jesus.**

Serving in His name and by His power always imitates Jesus. We all want people to see His reflection in our lives. That's why your example is so important. Missionary doctor, Albert Schweitzer, said "Example is not the best way of teaching, it is the only way!". So guard your example. People in our church and our neighbourhood are watching everything that we do. They're watching to see how we live. My example (your example too) should declare that we have fallen in love with this person named Jesus Christ, and he has transformed our lives.

Without question we are the only picture of "Jesus" that some of our neighbours see. Others are watching and when you serve in His name (in whatever form that might take) you imitate His life. The ways in which you talk to your family, to the child selling chocolate who has interrupted supper or even to your neighbour's dogs are being watched. Remember the wise words of St. Francis of Assisi: "Preach the gospel at all times, and, if necessary, use words."

John 13 illustrates Jesus' beautiful example regarding service. It was just before the Passover feast, and Christ knew that His time with them was short. They were ready for the meal, but the servant who would normally wash the feet of the guests was absent. Perhaps it was because it was Passover, and he was observing the meal with his

family. Whatever the reason, no one washed their feet as they came in.

How do you think the disciples might have felt as they saw Jesus taking off his outer garment and then with a towel and a basin going from one to the other to wash their feet. The Son of God performing the role of a low level servant.

HE PUTS HIS SERVANTHOOD INTO ACTION.

He had taught them this before but they seem not to have understood. So Jesus uses a visual lesson. Then He says (Vs 17):

*"Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do these things."*

Here's the Son of God going from person to person washing their feet; their dirty, smelly, calloused and cracking feet. I can imagine that if we were to have a foot washing service this morning it would make many of us (perhaps most of us) feel uncomfortable. We might be uneasy because either we didn't want to handle the feet of the person sitting beside us, or we didn't want them to see our feet, or probably both. It would make us feel uneasy because either of them have the same root cause; THE FACT THAT WE WANT TO PRESERVE OUR DIGNITY. It's a pride issue; we really don't want to wash someone else's feet. And we certainly don't want someone to wash ours.

If you imagine how **you might feel** if we sprang "foot washing" on you this morning it might be a taste of how the disciples must have felt that day when the Son of God washed their feet. We need to realize that serving, by its very nature, is often neither glamorous nor glorious (like Churchill's coal miners). So let us leave our dignity at the door, because it's not about us: it's about Him and it's about others.

**Every time you serve, every time you do a modern-day equivalent of washing feet, you are imitating Jesus.** The more you humbly serve the more people around you will start to see His resemblance, if you serve the way Jesus Christ served. **Perhaps your servant's heart** could actually soften hardened hearts around you so that they will be open to the gospel?

Richard Foster says, "There is a difference between choosing to serve and choosing to be a servant. When I choose to serve, I retain control about whom I serve and when I serve. But when I choose to be a servant, I have given up all rights and all control."

Choose to be a **servant** because in this kind of serving **imitates Jesus**

### **Lastly Serving changes you.**

*The story of Millard Fuller is an interesting one he was on his way to becoming a self-made millionaire before he was 30 years old. But devotion to work was threatening his health and his marriage. He needed a vacation. So, Fuller visited a church community near Americus, Georgia, called Koinonia Farm. It was led by a man who believed in simple living and good works. Clarence Jordan, a farmer-theologian, inspired Millard Fuller with his philosophy and personal example.*

*Clarence Jordan was convinced that poor people living in nearby dilapidated shacks could improve themselves with a little support. "These people don't need charity," he told Fuller. "They need a way to help themselves."*

*Millard Fuller agreed. He began what today is a worldwide organization whose goal is the elimination of inadequate housing as a witness to the gospel. He called it Habitat for Humanity and says that it runs on what he calls, "the theology of the hammer." Running this massive operation is not without problems. "There have been troubles and there will be more," says Fuller. "Tired bones. Disappointments. Disunity. Not enough money. No land. But God has called us to this ministry."*

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If you serve with an attitude of love and sense that Christ is the one who is receiving the glory, you can accomplish much and will earn the right to be heard.

Serving is putting our faith into action (James said "faith without work is dead") builds up the church and the community **but** the one "**who serves**" gains the most. The more we seek to serve, the more our own needs get met.

When we begin to serve others, we will **be changed!**

## **Conclusion – Serving**

- promotes unity**
- fosters teamwork**
- imitates Jesus**
- changes you**

I believe that we at WEFC are a people who do serve the Lord faithfully but I want to encourage you to keep it up. The Lord may be encouraging some to stretch themselves by taking on a new role – teaching a class in SS or Kids Under Construction, visiting home bound, or deciding that in 2009 you are going to attempt to meet all the people who live “10 houses” in any direction from you. Whatever opportunity that presents itself I encourage you to accept the challenge. We are never too old or too tired to serve the Lord in some way. The story is told of William Booth (founder of the Salvation Army) who in his later years had lost his eyesight. His son Bramwell was given the difficult task of telling his father there would be no recovery. "Do you mean that I am blind?" the General asked. "I hear we must contemplate that," his son replied. The father continued, "I shall never see your face again?" "No, probably not in this world." "Bramwell," said General Booth, "I have done what I could for God and for His people with my eyes. Now I shall do what I can for God without my eyes."

Whatever our age or ability there are still ways that we can serve God. May we all remember these words of our Lord recorded by Mark and may they guide and encourage our actions and re-actions as we live through 2009 to His Glory:

*Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:43:45)*