

Sermon for: Trinity Lutheran Church, Manilla

Maundy Thursday, March 28, 2024

Sermon Title/Theme: Guided to Service ("Guided to Cross" Series)

Sermon Text: John 13:3-5

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I enjoy the humor and sometimes the insight of the newspaper cartoons. A cartoon in recent Sunday's comic section caught my attention. The main character is standing on a platform with a self-promotion banner: "Gift for the ages!" When asked, "What is this?" the character responds, "My greatness does not get its due, so I'm reminding the world of my importance." He also adds, "The goal of every being on earth is to leave their mark and to be significant and in doing so gain some measure of immortality." When questioned, "You think that's everyone goal?" the egotistical character adds, "I know it is. It's what each and every one of us strives for in everything we do." Off to the side is another character behind a simple sign, "I just want to make one person's day better."

The cartoon fits this evening's "Guided to Service" worship theme. Jesus' greatness did not depend upon reminding the world of His importance. He was important! He was the Creator of all things. He was the Son of God. He was the all-powerful miracle worker and all-knowing teacher sent from God. Yet He came, "Not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many."

Jesus' mission to serve is demonstrated in the Thursday of Holy Week scene in the Upper Room. Jesus bends down with a basin of water and a towel and asks the disciples to sit down so that He can wash their feet. This is not something ordinarily done by the host of the meal. It is a

task reserved for the lowliest of servant. The disciples are taken aback. It is Peter, of course, who speaks in disbelief. Peter objects, "Lord, do you wash my feet? You shall never wash my feet!"

Jesus explains that the washing of the feet is necessary at this moment, "If I do not wash you, you have no part of me." When Peter boldly suggests that his head and hands also be washed, Jesus points to the fact that it is the feet that need the most cleaning. The feet were prone to getting more dusty and dirty on the road as the people of that day walked everywhere. The disciples' feet are made clean of dirt so that they can walk the road before them, and the implication is that their hearts would be clean of the filth of sin as they followed Jesus to the cross.

After completing the washing of the disciples' feet, Jesus continues with the application, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you an example that you should also do just as I have done to you." The washing of feet is a lesson in service.

The One who served His disciples washing their feet goes from that setting to the greatest act of service. Jesus goes to the cross where through the perfect sacrifice and shedding of His blood, He washes away all our sins. Jesus, who served the disciples in the Upper Room and served the sinful world from the cross, guides us to serve in Jesus' name. Jesus demonstrates: no job should be too demeaning for us to accept; no dirty or disgusting part of our service should prevent us from following through with helping another; no distraction should keep us from putting our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength into a task meant to benefit the needs

of others. No disciple was turned away by Jesus that night, even presumably, Judas. Jesus' servant heart still reached out to this one whom he knew would turn against Him.

So, how deep does our service go? How many feet have we washed lately, so to speak? What roles have we accepted if any, to serve in our family, our neighborhoods, our charitable organization, and our church? Holy Week is a perfect time to look around and say to ourselves, "Where is Christ guiding me to serve?" We can't do everything, of course, but there may be specific things or specific arenas that are tailor-made for us to use the skills and abilities that God has gifted us with. The cartoon quip is applicable: "I just want to make one person's day better." Who is that person for you?

From the food washing, Jesus turns the disciples' (and our) attention to the table where He has gathered His disciples. They have gathered to celebrate the Passover, where the unblemished lamb had been served prior to the Exodus and for generations that followed. Another Lamb is at this table and another feast was instituted. The very being of Christ who would give Himself on the cross as the perfect "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," gives Himself to those at the table, "Take and eat. This is my body which is given for you," and "Take and drink. This is my blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

The sacrament of Holy Communion is an act of service. Jesus serves us this holy meal for us to be nourished and strengthened in our faith and rid of our sins. The deep and moving service from our Lord takes place just as powerfully each time the bread and wine are consecrated on the altar and then given to you for the forgiveness of your sins. That service takes place at this altar. It also takes place individually in hospital rooms, nursing homes, and in living rooms. One

of the joys of pastoral ministry is representing our Lord and His church in serving those who are unable to be with us at this table and to give them the same assurance of forgiveness that you receive at this altar.

Christ serves us in the feast. Christ is with us in our serving of one another. And it is these two things that Christ gives us strength and direction as we are guided ever closer to the cross.

Tomorrow, we will be standing at the foot of Christ's cross and witnessing the ultimate act of service on our behalf—the giving of Himself for us that we might receive salvation from him and serve the Lord with gladness all our days here on earth and in the life to come.

There was one additional caption to the cartoon I referenced. The last caption responded to the statement "I just want to make one person's day better." The self-promoting character comments: "He might not be sane." To the world Jesus' action was "not normal." Jesus' action was one of perfect, loving intention. It was one of total sacrifice from the One who would make the total sacrifice of Himself on the cross on Good Friday.

May we too be guided to service not that is not humanly understandable but divinely inspired and directed, in Jesus' name. Amen.