

A sermon preached at Eternal Love Lutheran Church, Appleton, WI, by Pastor Robert O. Balza on the 14th Sunday of Pentecost, August 29, 2010.

iLife: “It’s Not About Me”

Sermon # 2

iServe

It’s All About Serving Others

1 Peter 4:10-11 (NIV)

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. 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. Amen.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, who came not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many, dear friends:

A number of years ago I was working as a volunteer evangelist in Milwaukee’s inner city. Once or twice a week I would drive into Milwaukee and do evangelism. Eventually I was able to recruit two boys to come to Sunday School. After a month of picking them up for Sunday School, I asked them if they would like to come for the service as well as Sunday School. I was glad to hear them say, “Sure, we want to come for the service!”

So I picked them up for church, and they sat fairly well through it. Afterwards I drove them home, and asked how they liked the church service. One boy simply said, “We didn’t get no service.” I said, “What?” Again he said, “We thought we were going to get some service, but we didn’t.”

“Ohhhhhhh”. Then it dawned on me what “service” meant to them. They thought it meant that the worship service was going to be like a restaurant and someone would be serving them food.

I smiled to myself. As I told them how good the worship service would be, I never thought they were expecting to BE SERVED when they came. Somehow they had the impression that being a Christian meant having others serve them.

Do you think some Christians still have that idea about church? Is our life as Christians about being served? Or is it about serving? Today’s Scripture lesson from Mark’s Gospel (10:35-45) should have answered that question.

But what does that mean? Why should my life be devoted to serving? As we take a closer look at our text from 1 Peter, we will see that because I am a disciple of Christ, I serve – I serve to show my love and I serve to share the Gospel.

I SERVE TO SHOW MY LOVE

Larry and Mary had been married for four years, and they were having problems. They decided to make an appointment with Pastor Anderson.

“What’s up?” their pastor said.

Mary spoke first: “Larry wants me to stay home all day and work around the house. He gets mad if I go shopping or go to visit my mom or something like that.”

“I don’t mind her going to see her mom,” Larry responded, but when I come home, I like to have the house clean and supper ready. Sometimes she doesn’t make the bed for 3 or 4 days in a row. I work hard, and when I come home, I would like to eat supper. But there are kids’ toys all over, dirty dishes next to the sink, and supper isn’t even started.”

Mary was quick to defend herself: “Well, he could help around the house once in a while. Every Saturday he plays golf with his buddies, and he’s gone most of the day.”

“I only go golfing in the summer.”

“Yeah, then you go hunting in the fall, ice fishing in the winter – it’s always something.”

“I work hard all week long. Saturday is my only day to relax and have some fun.”

“And when am I supposed to have some fun? I take care of the kids all day long, and then take care of you when you decide to come home.”

“That’s not fair!”

Pastor Anderson had heard enough. “Wait a minute. I think I can understand your problems. Larry, you don’t think that Mary loves you anymore because she doesn’t do the things that make you happy. And Mary, you also don’t feel loved because Larry isn’t doing the things for you that shows he loves you.”

They both nodded agreement.

“Then let’s change things. Here is a piece of paper for each of you. Now each of you do this: Write down four things that you would like your spouse to do for you – things that would make you happy. Go ahead, write.”

Larry and Mary each started making their lists. When they were both done, Pastor Anderson said, “Now exchange your lists.” After a brief hesitation, they traded papers.

“Larry, is there anything on your list that you cannot do?” Larry thought a second. “No.”

“Mary, is there anything on your list you can’t do?”

“No.”

“Then each of you go home and start to do those things for each other. Put the list on your dresser or someplace where you will see it each day. Then make a point of doing those things that you know will make your spouse happy.”

“Why?” Larry asked.

“Because the Bible says, ‘Serve one another in love’ (Galatians 5:13). Each of these little acts of service is an act of love. As you do them, your spouse will know that you love him or her.”

If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

Two weeks later, Larry and Mary came back to see Pastor Anderson. “How are things going?”

“Much better,” Mary said. “I’m feeling loved and appreciated again.”

“Me too,” Larry added.

Pastor Anderson said, “When we serve one another, we express our love and appreciation for each other. You can say that acts of service are one of the languages of love.”

“That’s so true,” Mary said. “Our marriage is proof of it.”

I SERVE TO SHARE THE GOSPEL

How many of you remember when you could go to a filling station (that’s the old term for gas station) and expect to be served? You would sit in your car, and the station attendant would come out. You would tell him something like, “Three gallons of regular.”

He would find the gas cap (some were hidden in clever places, like underneath the license plate, or behind one of the taillights), put the nosel in, and start the pump. Then he would pop the hood, check the oil, and wash the windshield and mirror. The whole process took awhile – maybe 10 minutes or more. Then you would give him the dollar for the three gallons of gas, and he would wave as you drove off.

Service like that is rare these days. Most everywhere, it is “self-serve.” No one comes out to help us fill the tank, and we don’t expect any help either. We just take care of ourselves.

Isn’t that something like what life is becoming in many other ways as well? It’s all about self-service. We just take care of ourselves. And everyone else takes care of themselves. It’s sort of natural to just look out for ourselves, and expect everyone else to do the same.

That’s why we either pity or admire people who deny themselves and spend their lives in service of others. Have you heard of Mother Teresa? She devoted her life to serving the desperately poor people of India. Many people call her a “saint” or a “hero” for the way she denied herself and spent her life serving others. Other people would call her a fool for giving away her life. What do you think? Are people who serve God and others “fools” – or “heroes”?

If you were to ask Jesus, he would not call them either “heroes” or “fools.” He would call people who serve others “blessed.” After washing the feet of His disciples, he told them that he had just given them an example of humble service and that they should do to others as He had done to them. Then He told them:

“Now that you know these things, you will be **blessed** if you do them” (John 13:17).

God wants you to know the blessing of giving up your life in service. In fact, He created you for works of service. When God shaped us in our mother’s womb, He endowed us with the abilities and characteristics necessary for doing some form of service. Then, when we were born again through the work of the Holy Spirit, God shaped us in a special way by giving us spiritual gifts that would enable us to be especially good and effective at some form of service. Our text says: *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.*

Sometimes we try to encourage people who are born with handicaps – either mental or physical – by assuring them and their families that God must have had something special in mind by creating them in this way. We say that God must have had a special plan for this person, and that’s why he or she is the way he or she is. Is that just pious talk meant to make someone feel better? Not at all! It is the truth. In fact, it is not only truth for people with handicaps, but for every “normal” person as well. We were all born with a special set of assets that make us perfect for some area of service to others.

The Bible teaches us that God created and made us to serve Him. We are not only God’s children, but we are also God’s servants. In fact, whether we do something to serve others, or whether we do something to serve God doesn’t make much difference. If we love Him and serve

out of love for Him, every act of service is for Him. This is what Jesus said: “Whatever you have done for others, you have done for me.” (Matthew 25:34-45).

In the story of Mary and Martha, one of the sisters was serving and one was listening to Jesus. We often use this story to emphasize the importance of listening to the words of Jesus. But that doesn't mean that Martha was doing something bad by serving. Does Jesus want us to come to church and sit and listen – and that's it? Not at all. He wants us to sit at his feet and listen, and then to get up and help and serve others. It's not a matter of either/or but of both/and.

Jesus wants to replace the selfish, and self-serving view of life with which we were born, with a new and radical philosophy of life. He models and encourages us to adopt a servant attitude – an approach to all of life that looks to serve rather than be served.

It takes a great power to change our whole view of life. It takes more than a sense of duty, fear, guilt, money, or even the promise of reward. What power is there that can change us from getters to givers? St. Paul put it this way: “For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died” (2 Corinthians 5:14).

We live busy lives, and have many commitments. But I know it is possible to re-arrange things to make time and energy to care for people, to serve the Lord, and to give of ourselves. And that's good, because that's why we are here. We are God's workmanship, made in a special way for some special ministry.

What did God make you for? Music? Teaching? Giving? Leading? Fixing? Encouraging? Greeting? Helping? It would be sad for you to go through life with just the ability that God's needs around here, but that it never was used. We need to believe that we were born for God's ministry. And we need His power to make us take on a ministry for Him and for the salvation of souls.

Let's work on that together. Amen.