

Sunday, September 29, 2019

I Timothy 6:6-19

Luke 16:19-31

### Be a Servant: Serving Christ Together

We continue in our fall series on “Be- a part of Christ’s Church” with our focus on what it means to be a servant of God. To begin just reflect a moment on this question, “If a tree falls in a forest, does anyone hear it?” In recent news from around the world, we are hearing questions like this being asked over and over again. This is because God’s creation as we understand it is changing quickly. Climate change is real as signs posted near the Ambassador Bridge stated on Friday. A small group of demonstrators were drawing attention to this worldwide problem and this was not the only assembly of people hoping others would support their ‘cause’. But is the demonstration enough? Climate change has brought extreme weather conditions which have affected many people in the last 10 or ever 5 or 2 years- hurricanes, floods, droughts and uncontrollable fires in forests around the world. Yet when we ask this simple questions “If a tree falls in a forest, does anyone hear it?” we might wonder what role should people take and do if we are truly wanting to be in covenant with God and His creation. We are in the Season of Creation and there are more Christians wanting to do something about creation because changes are happening at a faster rate than first expected. But what are we called to do as we seek to be Christ’s followers and to be a part of Christ’s church? Yes, we are to have faith and serve one another but as our Creed also states, “we are called to live with respect in Creation.”

During the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his friends, he got up from the table, took off his outer robe and tied a towel around himself. He then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and then he wiped them dry with the towel. Peter objected to Jesus doing this, because the washing of feet was a task of a slave in the household. But Jesus responded by saying that if he did not wash his feet Peter would not be able to share with him. Jesus finished the foot washing and then put his cloak back on and returned to the table. He said, I am your Teacher and Lord and if I have washed your feet, I have set you an example that you also should do as I have done to you. Servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. But I call you to serve one another.

Jesus served others. But how do we define what Jesus did? Did Jesus take on a servant role or the role of a slave? These are different and just what are we to do as His followers?

Servants we must remember are not slaves. Slaves do not have freedom, nor do they have any say in their possession or ownership. A slave may have rights based on the jurisdiction governing a slave, but the slave doesn't have a say in their ownership. A slave usually doesn't earn anything of value for their labor. They usually work for the benefit of their owner. Except, at times, owners have permitted slaves to earn something of value, which tends to complicate the definition. In contrast to this a servant is like an employee. Depending upon which time in history we are speaking, but generally, servants enter into either written or verbal agreements regarding their labor. A servant receives some kind of payment or something of value which might include room, board, or compensation for their labor.

So what role did Jesus take on as he washed the feet of his disciples= servant. They knew him to be their master as we do, yet he humbled himself for our sakes. He welcomed women to share in his ministry and He was willingly serving others as he taught and healed and spoke directly to those who needed to hear his words. Those who heard his words were in awe or were offended but either way, Jesus served those who in turn reached out and served others.

When Jesus told the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, he was telling the story of people. People who were very much like those in the crowd listening to him. Jesus' story includes people from different social classes –rich and poor but they also had some things in common. The rich man was wealthy and flaunted his wealth by what he wore and ate. However the named man, Lazarus, is poor, starving, and diseased who spends his life begging at the gate. But then what occurs is what is common to all. They both die. However the poor man is lifted up by angels and is with Abraham. The rich man however goes to Hades where he is in torment. The rich man knew Abraham and asked him to ask Lazarus to help him as he is in agony. Abraham then recalls the situation of where they each were in their life. The rich man then realizes that his situation will not change in Hades but again asks that Lazarus forewarn his family and friends about what will happen if they don't change their way of living. But Abraham tells them that they have had Moses and the prophets throughout their lives and did not follow. So why should someone who rises from death convince them?

This story puts the gap between the rich man and Lazarus in a different way by stating who now has the advantage and how because he believed and lived serving others as he could, and by showing his gratitude that others cared, Lazarus was experiencing God's glory. And the rich man who did not listen to the words of the prophets or anyone was in agony.

When we reflect on this teaching, we might think that Jesus was a bit harsh on the rich man and gave the best to Lazarus but what Jesus is also saying that just because you are master of your life on Earth you still must choose how you will live out eternity. Will you ignore those around you and their needs or will you speak for them when they have no voice, or are incapable for themselves? That is, will you serve others as Christ was servant for you?

There has been a rise in international concern about our Earth and climate change because many youth want government leaders to listen to them and to do something. There are demonstrations, summits, gatherings, special meetings all calling for government leaders to stop the pace of earth's destruction by working together for the common cause of life. But this is not something new. We have been lifting up the concerns of pollution in our waters and fields for years. Earth Day activities have been growing each spring but as we experience extreme weather patterns we know that this is not enough. There are people acting to save the forests, the waters and all that they contain and have been doing so since the early 1950's. According to Canadian Wildlife magazine (published by the Canadian Wildlife Federation) there is a movement around the world to give legal rights to nature itself. The UN endorses this idea. In February 2019 citizens of Toledo, OH voted that Lake Erie has a legal right to "exist, flourish and naturally evolve," so now humans can sue polluters on the lake's behalf. This is quite different than what Dr. Seuss wrote in the original 1971 version of The Lorax as he described what was happening to the pond where 'Humming-Fish hummed.' "No more can they hum, for their gills are all gummed. So I'm sending them off. Oh, their future is dreary. They'll walk on their fins and get woefully weary in search of some water that isn't so smeary. I hear things are just as bad up in Lake Erie."

People are standing up and wanting to stop the destruction of the lakes and forests and in essence are serving not only our brothers and sisters around the world who are in need, but all of God's creation. "The word of the Lorax seems perfectly clear. Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."

But how does enabling a lake to have rights, serve God and Christ? God designed the church to depend on the individual members to serve each other. Many people around the world are Christian brothers and sisters who have been affected by these weather extremes and we do not hesitate to send workers and aid to help them. But how do we actually serve Jesus in these situations? We change the hearts and minds of people and offer what Jesus offered to us—hope. Because Jesus thought of others before himself so do we as His faithful servants think of others first. As Romans 12:1 invites us to do, we are to take our everyday ordinary life—sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around-life—and

place it before God as an offering. This is our spiritual way of serving God as an extension of our worship of God here and now.

When we serve we are focusing on Jesus, not on earning favour with God or with people. Cynthia Heald writes, “True service always finds its source in loving our Savior, wanting to hear His Word, and then promptly obeying.” Yet the obeying part is not always followed through because there is a cost. And when there is a price to pay, people lose interest. Yet what was the cost to Jesus? Jesus was obedient to death on a cross. So what we need to do is to use human traits to welcome and have more people serving Jesus. People are more likely to buy into an idea that costs something out of pocket or their lives. But what does it cost? From a consumer point of view- nothing. Yet as a person who has grown in faith- one’s life is no longer their own—Jesus is my Saviour and Lord. This is the cost of discipleship (which we’ll focus on in two weeks). How much greater and beneficial is the cause of Christ- to know God and to know that you will forever be in Christ’s presence. There are elements of service which will be modified as the needs of people change but sacrifice is necessary if there is going to be true growth and ministry. Service can’t always be easy but it can be hopeful.

Being a servant of Christ is part of who we are as brothers and sisters of Jesus. The main goal is serving Jesus and the means by which we do this, is serving one another. For Jesus is the source of joy and therefore, we can be joyful servants for Him. Serving Jesus is a calling from the heart, not a task. Joyful servants willingly sacrifice and don’t complain. How are you serving Jesus in His church? There are many ways to serve Christ and to grow in faith as you do this. How are you serving Jesus? To be a part of Christ’s church today is challenging but there is fun, laughter, support encouragement and all the glory goes to Jesus.

Let us pray:

God of love and wonder we praise you that you call us to be a servant in this church family. Help us to find our place to serve one another as we strive to grow in love for you and understanding of you who might be for us. Show us Jesus and remind us always that He is our master and we serve him alone. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.