

Moving from Membership to Discipleship: Service
Philippians 2:3-8
February 5, 2012

Grace, mercy, and peace from our Lord, Jesus Christ, who came to earth not to be served, but to serve.

The text for our message today is from the second chapter of Philippians. Since the content of this passage is so important to us and so foreign to us, please listen closely as I read it.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! (Php 2:3-8 NIV).

Well, that sure shoots a big hole in the American philosophy of “It’s all about me,” doesn’t it? Because it’s not all about me and it’s not all about you, either. In reality, it’s all about him and because it’s all about him it’s all about them. Now if that made your brain hurt, don’t worry about it. We’ll come back to that statement.

Today, we are talking about the fourth of the six Christian disciplines. This one is the discipline of service. Serving others isn’t a very popular topic in modern day America. This is the land of opportunity. This is the land where everyone can be whatever they want to be. This is the land of rugged individualists. This is the land of you first after me. This is the land where people don’t mind running down other people while they’re chasing the American dream.

Pastor, can you be serious? Are you telling me I’m supposed to be serving other people? Why, I’ve spent my whole adult life working hard so other people could serve me. And that, my friends, is exactly why Paul wrote this message to the church in Philippi. You see, they had the same problem.

The self-centeredness of the average American is no more new than the sun rising in the east and setting in the west. From the moment Eve first took hold of that forbidden fruit, human beings have found it almost impossible to look beyond themselves to the wants and needs of others.

Today, we will look at three things that revolve around the topic of Christian service; why is it so hard; what are we going to do about it; and what might happen when real Christian service takes place.

So, why is it so hard to put other people ahead of ourselves? The pat answer for that is – we’re sinful. We’re just sinful people and that makes us selfish.

But I don't like pat answers. They're too easily stated and too often not taken to heart. Let's go just a little deeper. Yes, our selfishness, our inward perspective, is due to our sinfulness but there are other related things we must look at in order to see our real selves.

Let's face it, we are as self-centered as we are because we just don't love other people the way we should. I believe that everyone has about the same amount of love to give. The difference from one person to the next is who they spend their love on. And if we spend all our love on ourselves, there just isn't any left for other people. That's one reason we don't serve others.

There's another reason why we don't spend our time and energy and resources serving others and this one hurts even more than the first one. Before I explain this one let me say that when I wrote this part I flinched. Probably the same way some of you might flinch soon. Are you ready?

We don't serve because we don't love Jesus enough. Ouch!! Jesus said: *If you love me, you will obey what I command* (Jn 14:15 NIV). Jesus also said that the two great commandments were – love your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength – and love your neighbor as yourself, or put another way, love your neighbor as much as you love yourself. *If you love me, you will obey what I command.* Ouch!

Okay, now we know why we don't serve others as we should. So the next hurdle is what are we going to do about this. There are three things to do about this problem. First, we need to be going to God in prayer. We need to be asking for forgiveness for the way we've been and strength to turn our thinking and our lives around.

No one can truly be in service to his neighbor without the help of God. In our sinful nature, we have no desire to do anything for anyone but ourselves. We need an outside power source to get ourselves straightened out and that power comes only through prayer.

After we've confessed and been forgiven, we need to start house cleaning. Personal house cleaning. We need to go through our closets of selfishness, greed, and pride and start throwing out all the lame excuses we use for not serving. I don't know what your excuses are so let's just pull out just a couple and see if you recognize of them.

How about I don't have any time to serve. Right. That one will really hold water. You've got the same 24 hours in every day that everyone else has. The problem with time is just like the problem with love. It's not how much you have but how you're spending it. If you're spending all your time making money to satisfy an American hunger for more toys, forget it. There aren't enough toys to satisfy that hunger.

How about I don't have any talents to serve with. Well, that won't fly either. God has gifted everyone with something they can share with another. If that statement isn't true, then God makes some junk people. But God doesn't make junk.

Service can be as simple as sitting and talking to someone who's shut-in and lonely. Service can be coming to church to help tidy up or volunteering to help our friends at Lutheran City Ministries. Service can be as easy as serving on a board, or being an usher, or teaching Sunday school.

Okay, 1) we're going to ask for forgiveness and strength, 2) we're going to throw out the lame excuses we use, and 3) we're going to roll up our sleeves and get busy. Nothing will be accomplished here today if you just sit here and agree with me then go home and go back to business as usual. To correct this problem of lack of service we need action.

If you remember, a few weeks back I told you the life of a Christian was a life of action not inaction. In the interest of not being here all day, I'm not going to stand here and list all the ways there are to serve both your church and your neighbor. I've already given you two suggestions but here is one more. I am looking for a few people who would come in and help assemble a special item which we will be giving to everyone on the last Sunday of this sermon series. This job doesn't require any more talent than cutting, hole punching, and tying.

The last item we need to examine about serving is what are the effects of Christian service. When a Christian serves both his fellow man and his church, that Christian is following Christ. Jesus said: *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me* (Lk 9:23 NIV).

Jesus led a life of service. And we are to follow his example. That's why I said earlier that it's all about him – Jesus – and since it's all about him it's all about them. The Gospel writer records Jesus saying: *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve* (Mk 10:45 NIV). And as we follow Christ in a life of service two things will happen.

Serving has a positive effect on the server and on the served. The server reaps what is called a God trick. A God trick is what happens when we do what God wants and the benefit of our actions don't go to God they come back to us. When we lay down our lives for our Lord and for our neighbor, guess who ends up feeling good, guess who ends up feeling all charged up, guess who walks away with a wonderful feeling of usefulness? That's right. We do.

I don't know of too many things that can bring more joy into a person's life than knowing that they have been useful to someone else. Have you ever volunteered for something that you felt was worthwhile? How did you feel when it was over? Are you looking for something to spice up your life? Serve. Are you looking for something to add meaning to your life? Serve. Are you looking for something to raise a bruised self-esteem? Serve. Are you looking to love and to be loved? Serve.

That's one benefit of service. The other benefit, and the more important benefit of serving, is the effect that serving has on the one who is served. When we serve, we

touch others with the love of Christ. Touching people with the love of Jesus is our primary function here on earth. We are here, not so we can indulge ourselves with pleasures and luxuries, we are here so we might be God's chosen vehicles to reach the lost.

When the lost of the world see us serving our church, they see our love for our church. When the lost of the world see us serving each other, they see our Christian love for each other. When the lost of the world see and feel us serving them, they see and feel not only our love for them but also Christ's love for them. That is important. Christians who are serving are Christians who are loving, Christians who are witnessing, Christians who are evangelizing. And acts of loving, witnessing, and evangelizing can reach the hearts of the unsaved.

Now for our quick review of the disciplines we've covered so far. The Bible is God's love letter to you. Prayer is God's open line of communication so his kids can stay in touch. Worship is our thankful response for all the love that God showers on us daily. And serving is God's way of keeping us tied together as a family and his way for us to touch the world with his love.

In the weeks to come, you are going to be hearing from me about ways to serve our church, each other, and our neighbors. I pray that each of you will respond to the call to serve, the call to pick up your cross and follow Jesus.