

“A God who Serves” by Rev. Steven Sommerer  
March 21, 2021 Fifth Sunday in Lent

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

The sermon text for today is from Mark 10:32-45 previously read.

Our God is a God who serves... who, indeed, came not to be served, but to serve. Even our Sunday worship services are called Divine Services, because the important thing about what happens here – the thing we emphasize - isn't our worship, but God serving and giving. God loves to serve His children with His gifts. Psalm 23 tells us He *“spreads a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.”* Talk about turning human wisdom on its head. God joys to serve you. He even says that's how you glorify Him best, by letting Him be the God who delivers. *“Call upon Me,” God promises, “in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you, and you will glorify Me.”*

Of course, James and John have some different ideas. Their vision of God's Kingdom didn't involve service, but positions of power and glory at the right and left. To them, Jesus was going places, and they were ready to hitch themselves along for the ride.

How is it with you? Are you much different? Are you quick to empty yourself in service and love? Or are you fast to assert your stature and prominence? Is self-assertion and leaping to the front of the line more your style? I'll always remember when I was a kid how we'd have potluck dinners and there was always a scrum with the kids pushing to get through line first? I can still see the scene when my mom pulled me aside and informed me how obnoxious it was for us able-bodied kids fighting to the front and leaving our senior saints behind. I hadn't thought of it. But that's kind of a maturity thing that we're theoretically supposed to outgrow.

Most of the time we can put on a good face for each other, probably it's our parents and spouses who know we're still pretty selfish. We know what happens to those who exalt themselves, Jesus says they will be humbled. James and John – and probably you and I – need to be humbled... need to be stripped of our self-love... need God's gift of repentance, so that from our knees we can look into the heart of the God who serves.

In God's wisdom and will, He doesn't give us little cubicles in heaven at right and left, He places us in vocations where we receive God's good gifts and learn to serve and share those gifts with others. God feeds and cares for you through your boss, and when you serve your boss, you serve God and your customer. God sets you in a family so He can give daily bread through moms and dads and we can serve each other as God commands us, children learning to honor and serve their parents in glory to God. Parents become stand-ins for God, as God reaches through them, and parents express their love and praise to God in honoring and obeying for Jesus' sake.

That's how God works to provide earthly blessings, but it's the same when Christ gives His spiritual gifts and grace. God doesn't convey grace by lightning bolts from heaven, He calls pastors to preach, and the Word always accomplishes the purpose for which He sent it. Within the Church, God calls us to give our time and our talents

and our money to support the preaching of the Gospel and we pray that God's Kingdom come by the power of His Spirit. Within each of these callings or vocations in the community, workforce, family and church, we steward God's gifts for the duration of these short lives, receiving God's goodness and giving back for His Kingdom.

In God's will and design He gave marriage to serve His children, never to be had selfishly without commitment, but a life-long commitment between one man and one woman... We must constantly reinforce this with our young people. No marriage can begin with God's blessing when we don't follow God's will. That means marry a Christian and don't play marriage or shack up, do it God's way. Scripture says Christ has His Bride the Church. Jesus didn't use and take advantage of His Church without commitment. In the beginning Eve was drawn from her husband Adam's side. We see Christ's commitment when His Bride is drawn from His Bride by the water and blood that flowed from Jesus at the cross.

Marriage isn't playing house waiting till we can get all the extraneous things in order. In marriage we learn to serve another person for whom Christ died... learning to forgive one another for Jesus' sake; to empty oneself in service to another; to rejoice and to give and receive love, trusting He will give us all that we need. Within that holy calling, children are raised to know the Savior. In God's design this one man and one woman gift is His loving service for the good of His children, as two selfish sinners learn to love as we have been loved. Christian marriage becomes a picture of Christ and His Bride the Church. *"Whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all."*

James and John didn't trust God would give what they needed. Maybe they were worried they'd get lost in the shuffle, that Peter and Andrew were starting to rise to the top. They didn't trust God knew best how to save them; what best they needed. Their real problem is a first commandment problem, they didn't fear, love and trust in God above all things. They thought they could be Jesus' handlers.

James and John and their desire for power and position led to a fight. Christ had just explained He would soon die and rise from the dead... Their politicking behind the scenes led to war among the 12, because none of the 12 trusted God would take care of them. They were all afraid Jesus wouldn't see how they deserved to be first and greatest. When the devil planted the seed in James and John that they deserved better, soon Jesus' disciples were all behaving like children.. No one cared about serving for Jesus' sake.

Jesus' worldview is very different – He said, *"My Kingdom is not of this world."* That's true for you disciples of Jesus too. You are strangers here. Heaven is your home. For all the good gifts we enjoy, our calling is to take up our crosses and follow Jesus, not running from the hard things in life. Doing God's will, even if it costs more money; even if people try to convince us not to follow God or walk in His path.

What's right doesn't change, because it's more difficult. Marriage isn't disposable when it gets hard. We learn to serve. Human life isn't disposable when it's old and frail or aborted when inconvenient in the mother's womb. Life is a gift we honor it. True faith trusts even life's crosses are for our good and shouldn't be despised or worked around. When those crosses are heavy and hard, *"God will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear."* Philippians 2 says, *"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing taking the nature of a servant, being made in*

*human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.”*

God the Father created all things in heaven and on earth through Christ the eternal Son. But this sinless Son of God chose to take human flesh. He chose to do hard things - to walk the path of rejection and humiliation and horrible suffering so that you and I could share His eternal heavenly home. He became weak, so you could be strong in the assurance of your salvation. He chose poverty, so you could be rich with heavenly mansions in your future. He chose death, so you could know a perfect life that never ends where you'll share with Jesus the riches of His love that you can't even begin to imagine. Beloved, since Christ so loved you, *“Love one another.”*

Christ didn't come because His disciples then or now get it right. Jesus said, *“Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.”* That little word ransom goes back to slavery days. When a slave was purchased, the ransom price was paid.

Jesus paid your price. He gave His life. He emptied Himself in sacrificial service for you! You'll find that message all over the Bible. 1 Corinthians 6 says, *“You are not your own. You were bought at a price.”* 1 Peter 1 says, *“It was not with perishable things such as gold or silver that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you, but with the precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without blemish or defect.”*

Jesus' perfect life, sufferings and death were for this very reason, so that slaves like you and I, who push and pull for prominence and power, could hear and believe and rejoice - we're free! He came so that we could learn true contentment in His love. We don't have to find our greatness by stepping on someone else's head, like our classmates, or spouse or kids or fellow workers or even our church family. Greatness is found in the saving arms of Jesus, not pushing someone else's head down so you can step higher. We find God's greatness, not in our striving, but in resting in Him.

Just as then at the cross, once again, today, God is among us as One who serves. God is - love. He serves us in His Word, at His altar, washes us and forgives us, and just like that Last Supper, He says, *“I have given you an example by washing your feet that you should do likewise.”* By God's grace you are washed clean in His love. As God is serving you, may God enable us to serve each other. Amen.

And now may the peace of God which surpasses human understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.