



## Next STEPS – SERVE! October 21, 2018

This is the sixth and, in fact final week of a series we've been calling Next Steps ... as in *next steps to a better you*. If you missed any of the series just go to our website and click on messages. Over the past few weeks we have identified those specific simple steps.

These steps are choices – life style choices that we believe are essential to growing in a relationship with Christ, a relationship in which He can change and transform us. Today we are going to talk about the last step - Sharing our Faith.

To grasp this step and the depth of its meaning we're going to be looking at just a single verse from the Gospel of Mark. And to establish the context for this verse it is important to remember that Jesus 12 followers assumed that he would one day be king, in fact, that's why they were following him. Mark tells us that one-day two of their number, James and John, approached Jesus with a request concerning when he did, in fact, become king, could they please, *please* have positions of privilege and power in the kingdom.

It's sort of a naïve request but even so, when the other apostles hear about it they get angry and jealous. They all wanted those positions too. So Jesus sees this in-fighting and these ill feelings among his friends and followers and he doesn't let it go on, he decides he needs to tackle the situation. Jesus puts the issue right out on the table to teach an important lesson.

Mark tells us Jesus called them together and said to them

***“You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority felt.” Mark 10:42***

The disciples were thinking, yes, *of course we do*. That's why we want to be in charge. Right now we feel *lorded over* by the Roman authorities and the Jewish religious leaders and we'd like to do a little *lording over* somebody ourselves. That was simply the thinking of the time: if you had authority and power, you use it to take advantage of others. So what Jesus says next is a completely radical statement.

***“You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles Lord it over them and their great ones make their authority felt.” But it shall not be so among you.” Mark 10: 42-43***

**I'm not calling you to use whatever power you enjoy in my service for yourself,**

***“Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be a servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all.” MK 10: 43-44***

Jesus explains that in God's estimation, in God's eyes, the one who serves most is the greatest, the one who is counted first of all will be the servant of all. **Why? Because, because, because...**

***“The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45***

Jesus often called himself “The Son of Man” a title he used to suggest his mission. And here he explains what that mission is. He says the whole reason he came among us, was not to *be served*, but to *serve*. To serve, and to be *a ransom for many.*” Mark 10.45

When we use the word *ransom*, we usually think of a kidnapping situation in which the kidnapper demands money. In Jesus’ day a ransom was used much more widely actually referring to a debt.

If you were in debt to someone, and you couldn’t pay off that debt, then you would become their servant and work it off. Unless someone else stepped in and paid the debt off for you. That was a ransom.

Jesus here teaches the apostles that he has come to pay the ransom for humanity. Every single person has been born in sin. Now being born in sin does not make you bad person; it makes one a slave.

It means that even though there is good you want to do - **you don’t do it**. It means that even though there is bad stuff you want to avoid, you **don’t avoid it**.

Sin is the reason why you yell at your kids even though you don’t want to. Sin is the reason why you don’t have control over your eating habits or your spending habits, or your anger. Sin is why you hurt the people you love the most.

The story of creation is that God created the world good. He gave us everything we needed, but at a certain point as a human race we turned our back on God and so sin entered the world.

*That* story is *our* story. We’ve all gone our **own way**. We have been ungrateful for His gifts. There were events, seasons, decisions, in which you turned your back on God. **All of us have.**

And it wasn’t a one-time deal .It’s an over and over again kind of deal. In fact, sin can be so pervasive and persistent in our life that it is a form of enslavement.

Creating a debt I cannot pay, that was paid *for me* by Christ on the Cross, thus he is the ransom.

A ransom he pays out of love - only out of love. It is a ransom we do not deserve, we did not earn,

We could never work our way into or even ever pay off. There is only one thing we can do with it: **Share it.**

God charges us and sends us to share this message with the world. Gospel means “good news.” And that’s what we are called to share. And Jesus gave us that good news.

Good news that you don’t have to be a slave to sin but also good news that even when you do fail and fall there’s another chance and a fresh start waiting for you.

Good news that you don’t have to be a perfect person for God to love you God loves you right now, today as you are, even while calling you to more. Now, if you’ve got good news, and you really believe it, the thing you *cannot do*, the thing you *never do*, is keep it to yourself.

In fact, usually you can't wait to share it.

- The woman who finds out she's pregnant
- the couple who become engaged
- the candidate who gets the big job
- the student who aces the test

Those are not things you keep to yourself. Good news has got to be shared. But sharing the message of our faith can seem challenging, even daunting.

- **First**, because if you grew up Catholic, there was absolutely no emphasis on this. It wasn't even a consideration so it doesn't seem very important to most of us.
- **Second**, because we've seen it done badly, through intrusive, maybe even offensive methods.
- **And third**, simply because we have no strategy to approach this step.

And in a culture in which religion has been more or less marginalized, it is not talked about - a strategy is essential. We can't do much about your past experiences, except to encourage you to put them behind you. But we can definitely help you with the strategy part.

Our strategy here at Holy Eucharist for sharing the good news is simple. It's called:

**Invest and Invite.** **Invest** in the people you know, people in your family, your neighborhood, parents from your kids school, or lacrosse team or dance class; people who do not have a relationship with Christ and his Church.

**Invest** in them relationally, conversationally, prayerfully: make an investment in them by praying for them daily. And then, when the opportunity arises, *and it always eventually does*, invite them to church. Offer to take them to church, or to meet them here. Promise them breakfast or coffee afterwards.

For our part, as a church staff, we promise and pledge to partner with you, putting time and effort in making sure your guest has a great experience. And all of us can help out in other ways too our greeters, host ministers, café ministers, all our kids ministers too, are all partnering together to create an environment that aims at communicating good news.

And you can do that too: you can be aware of your surroundings by being aware of someone new. You can smile and greet guests gladly and warmly.

As you know our parish has been participating in a program mandated by our Bishop called Faith in Our Future. It is a program to strengthen the Catholic presence in southern Burlington County. Our cohort (this particular cluster of parishes - Holy Eucharist, St. Joan of Arc, St. Mary of the Lakes, St. Isaac Jogues and St. John Neumann ) have been meeting since this program was first initiated over a year ago to discuss how we will move forward together to strengthen our parishes and strengthen the Catholic in Southern Burlington County. A few weeks ago at our meeting we discussed the topic of Evangelization. How each of our parishes going to share the Good News and grow our parishes and **in particular Mass Attendance.**

The challenge that was put before us was to increase our increase our members Mass attendance by 3% over this entire year. We each put forth a plan of action - an action plan to grow disciples.

For us at Holy Eucharist we have been actively engaging people through our weekly communications, our music, our messages, our welcome center, our café, our children's programs, our faith formation, our youth ministry. The staff has been doing their part to make this happen.

**So now its time for you to do your part.** I put before you the challenge you heard me share with you in this message series - the importance of this last step in growing your relationship with the Lord. So let this be the process for our community as we move forward with this challenge.

**INVEST and INVITE. - INVEST and INVITE**

Sharing your faith is elemental and essential to discipleship. Either this is important to us or it isn't important to us? **You have a definite part to play in growing disciples and spreading the good news in this parish.** Our response to that question will be evident over the next several months.

Will we participate or will we absent ourselves? We have been called to follow the Lord, step by step, on the path of greatness.

A little bit more today than yesterday

A little bit more tomorrow than today

And in the process discovering a more successful  
a greater way to live.