

At Home Worship
October 17, 2021
First Presbyterian Church-Sweetwater

Find a Sacred Space

Sit comfortably, perhaps with something warm to drink, where you can look out on the beauty Of God’s creation today. Read aloud or quietly to yourself, or as a family share the various parts of the service.

Greeting - The Lord be with you. **And also, with you.**

Call to Worship and Prayer of Praise

Let all who have gathered this day hear the Lord's call to service.

Is there greatness to be achieved in the service of the Lord?

Yes, but the rewards are eternal and not just of this world.

Must we toil long and hard serving others to receive God's blessing?

To serve with Christ, one must be willing to be the servant of all.

Blessed be the name of the Lord!

Gracious God, whose Son taught us a new allegiance to your Kingdom, open our hearts to the newness of your system of values; that we may transform our goals and expectations in accordance with your ideal of servanthood rather than our idol of success. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn “Seek Ye First” # 175

1. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things, shall be added onto you, Alleu, alleluia!
2. Ask and it shall be given unto you, Seek and ye shall find. Knock and the door shall be opened onto you. Alleu, alleluia!
3. You shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God Alleu, alleluia!

A Time of Confession and Assurance

Lord, so often when You would have had us serve we have found excuses to turn away. In our minds or in our pride, we simply wanted to do the things we wanted to do, they were more important than serving You. You have brought us to those who needed help, but we would not give it; others who needed a word of comfort, but we were silent. Forgive us, Lord, and use us now.

(silent prayer of personal confession).....Amen.

As Jesus healed the afflicted and restored those who have died, he also forgives our sins and gives us new life. Friends, believe the good news of the gospel. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!

1. Will you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you? Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.
2. We are pilgrims on a journey; we're together on the road. We are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.
3. I will hold the Christ light for you in the night time of your fear. I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear.
4. I will weep when you are weeping; when you laugh, I'll laugh with you. I will share your joy and sorrow till we've seen this journey through.
5. When we sing to God in heaven, we shall find such harmony, born of all we've know together of Christ's love and agony.

Something To Die For

Mark 10:35-45

It is one of the most dramatic stories to come out of the Civil War. Colonel Joshua Chamberlain of the Union Army's 20th main regiment received orders from General George Meade to shoot 120 deserters, or take them with him into battle at Gettysburg. No one would be allowed to return home. At this point in time, the Union army was demoralized and in disarray, and Chamberlain's decision would be a monumental one. He walked slowly to where the deserters waited, knowing that he had to make a decision about the fate of these men in a matter of minutes.

What do you suppose he planned to do when he reached them? Would he order them to be executed? Would he order them to follow him into battle, and kill only those who refused to accompany him? What would he do? Would he even want to go into battle with men who had already shown cowardice? What would you have done in his situation? Remember that you only have a few minutes to decide. We'll come back to this dramatic moment in American history.

James and John, two of Jesus' disciples, weren't deserters, but it's clear that they didn't have a clue what they were getting into when they signed on to walk with Jesus. They were sort of like you and me. Many of us came to church riding primarily on our family's faith. We identify ourselves as Christians mainly because our parents were Christians. We're not pagans or Jews or Muslims. We believe in Jesus, but we've never really given much thought to what that means. We enjoy church, and prayer comforts us. We treasure the relationships we've made in church. We're not saints, but to tell the truth, we don't strain our lifestyles too much by trying to be disciples. We can relate to James' and John's concerns.

One day they came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." (NRSV) Be cautious whenever someone approaches you with a request like that, because they're getting ready to ask for something major.

This probably amused Jesus, because, as usual, his disciples were clueless. The Master may have had a sly smile on his face when he asked, "What is it you want me to do for you?"

They answered him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."
(NRSV)

Well, that's certainly not us! We're definitely not glory hogs. We don't have to be, or need to be, in the top spot. It doesn't bother us if someone else in the church choir is chosen to sing the solo, or if the class elects someone else as president. It doesn't bother us if someone else gets the lion's share of the pastor's attention or is nominated for chairman of the board. Even at the office, it doesn't rile us even a little if someone else got the promotion or the raise that we were expecting. Number one? No, not us. James and John want to sit at the head table. They want recognition and glory. Don't we all?

They didn't have a clue where Jesus was leading them. In fact, Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

James and John wanted to ride in on Jesus' coattails. Jesus would win the victory, but they would bask in reflected glory on his left hand and his right. There are people like that. They want someone else to make the sacrifice, someone else to pay the bill.

The great preacher Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick once preached a sermon titled "Parking on Another Man's Nickel." That title alone should give you an idea how long ago this sermon was preached. The allusion was to a parking meter that hasn't quite expired. We pull in and park our car and see that enough time is left on the meter for us to take care of our business. Lucky us. We won't have to put any of our own money in the meter. And so, we are parking on somebody else's nickel, or quarter, or dollar.

There are people like that in every society. They want to enjoy the benefits of freedom, but they don't want to make the sacrifices necessary to ensure that the next generation has the same benefits that they have enjoyed. Let someone else pay taxes, serve in the military, and participate in elections. There are people like that in the church. They want the church to always be there. They want us to have a first-class ministry to children and youth. They expect excellent facilities and exciting music. They just don't want to foot the bill themselves. Jesus knew and understood. He told his two ambitious disciples, "You don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

James and John still didn't get it. They replied, "We are able." Actually, they probably thought they were able. But the records show that they were not nearly as able as they thought they were. There would be many ups and downs in their discipleship. Jesus knew they were not yet ready. But he was trying to prepare them. He said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." James and John would serve their master ably, but first they would need some rough edges removed from their discipleship.

About this time the other disciples were eager to help remove some of those edges. They were angry with James and John for making such a presumptuous request to sit at the Lord's left hand and his right. After all, they might be the ones chosen to sit by Christ's side.

It was then that Jesus took his disciples aside and taught them one of the most important truths of our faith. He said to them, "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Following Christ is about serving others. That's the point of this lesson. Following Christ is about serving others.

In just a few short weeks we will begin to see people in uniforms in shopping malls ringing bells collecting donations for the poor. They are doing the work of the Salvation Army.

In 1878, when the Salvation Army was really beginning to make its mark, men and women from all over the world began to enlist. A man who had once dreamed of becoming a bishop in another denomination crossed the Atlantic from America to England to enlist in the Salvation Army instead. His name was Samuel Brengle. Brengle left a fine pastorate to join William Booth's Army. At first General Booth accepted his services reluctantly and grudgingly. Booth said to Brengle, "You've been your own boss too long." So, in order to instill humility in Brengle, he made him work by cleaning the boots of other trainees.

Discouraged, Brengle said to himself, "Have I followed my own fancy across the Atlantic in order to black boots?" Then, as in a vision, he saw Jesus bending over the feet of rough, uneducated fishermen. "Lord," he whispered, "you washed their feet; I will black their shoes."

Samuel Brengle went on to establish the Salvation Army in America. At the time of his death, the Salvation Army was thriving in both the United States and in Canada. Just before his death Brengle sent out a short memo to all of his top leaders. This memo had one single word written on it: "Others."

If serving others is not your cup of tea, you won't be very happy in Christ's family. In fact, if you don't have an area of your life in which you serve someone other than yourself, you aren't going to be very happy anywhere. Serving others is healthy for mind, soul, and body.

I was interested to read a study by psychologist Larry Scherwitz. Scherwitz found that people who are what he calls "self-involved" have more severe coronary artery disease than those who are more focused toward others. He studied 150 patients hospitalized either for suspected heart disease or after a heart attack. He monitored how often they used the pronouns "I, me, my, mine, or myself." He found that patients with more severe disease made far more references to themselves. His findings remained significant even when he matched patients for age, blood pressure, cholesterol, and Type A behavior.

One of the best things you can do for yourself is to stop thinking of yourself all the time. Take the focus off yourself and consider the needs of others and you'll be healthier, happier, and more fulfilled. You will also be more of what Christ called you to be. Following Christ is about service.

Why? Because that was what Christ was about. Jesus did not write down a list of requirements for those who wanted to follow him. He required no catechism. Instead, he provided the ultimate example of sacrificial love. He said to his ambitious followers: ". . . whoever wishes to be first

among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

You and I are called to choose a lifestyle that includes service and sacrifice. Why? Because it will get us into heaven? No. That's already promised. We don't serve others in order to ensure our salvation. We serve in order to try to be more like our Master.

A catchword in today's business world is "servant leadership." No one ever personified that quality more than Jesus. We serve and we sacrifice because we want to be more like him.

Let's return now to our story about the Civil War. It has an exciting ending. Colonel Joshua Chamberlain had a decision to make. He had been ordered to shoot 120 deserters or take them with him. When he reached these frightened men, he immediately ordered that they be unshackled. Then he fed them a meal before listening to their grievances. He told them that he was ordered to shoot those who would not follow him into battle. But he promised them that he would not give that order. He told the men, "This is free ground. All the way to the Pacific Ocean. No man has to bow. No man is born to royalty. Here we judge you by what you do, not by what your father was. Here you can be somebody. Here is a place to build a home. It isn't the land. There's always more land. It's the idea that we all have value, you and me, we're worth something more than dirt. I never saw dirt I'd die for, but I am not to asking you to die for dirt. What we're all fighting for in the end is each other." When Colonel Chamberlain finished his speech, 116 of the 120 deserters joined him in his march to Gettysburg. This helped to turn the tide of battle for the Union army on that historic battlefield.

One hundred sixteen men out of 120 were willing to die for the idea that all people have value. Jesus' disciples also gave their lives for an idea--the idea that Jesus was indeed the Savior of the world. What inspired them to follow him? They knew that he would do the same for them. In fact, he had already done the same for them.

James and John wanted fame and celebrity. They wanted to sit by Christ's side in his glory. Instead, they drank of the cup from which he drank, the cup of service and sacrifice. What changed them? They came to know what it meant to follow Jesus. So can we.....

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn "Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us With Your Love" #203

1. Kneels at the feet of his friends, silently washes their feet, Master who acts as a slave to them.

Refrain:

Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love, show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you.

2. Neighbors are wealthy and poor, varied in color and race, neighbors are near us and far away.

Refrain:

Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love, show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you.

3. These are the ones we should serve; these are the ones we should love; all these are neighbors to us and you.

Refrain:

Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love, show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you.

4. Loving puts us on our knees, silently washing their feet, this is the way we should live with you.

Refrain:

Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love, show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you.

Blessing

Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, in truth and love. 2 John 3