

Be Humble and Serve Others, Matthew 23:1-12 (11/01/20)

When I was little, my Sunday school teacher always did one activity at the end of the VBS. Its title is a meal in heaven or hell.

(Slide 1) In front of us, there was a dinner table full of delicious food. She gave us long chopsticks, about as long as an adult's arm length, to each one of us. And she gave us one rule to do this activity. "This is an all you can eat table, but you are only allowed to eat using your chopsticks not using your hands or another tool." At first, everyone was busy trying to feed themselves, but soon they realized that feeding oneself is impossible using these long chopsticks. Now, you may find a hidden rule of this activity. Only if you try to feed another person, can you also eat this food. These chopsticks were not for serving myself, but for serving others. From this, I learned a very important lesson that when we try to serve others, everyone will be happy together.

(Slide 2) Today's gospel scripture leads us to think about servant leadership, which is a leadership style of Jesus. Verse 11-12 says, "The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted." Although Jesus is the only Rabbi, teacher, and leader, he had never exalted himself, rather he always humbled himself and serve others. Although Jesus respected Scribes and Pharisees as interpreters of the law of Moses, he criticized their actions.

(Slide 3) Let me read verse 4-7 again using the Message Bible. "Instead of giving you God's Law as food and drink/ by which you can banquet on God, they package it in bundles of rules, loading you down like pack animals. They seem to take pleasure in watching you stagger under these loads and wouldn't think of lifting a finger to help. Their lives are perpetual fashion shows, embroidered prayer shawls one day and flowery prayers the next. They love to sit at the head table at church dinners, basking in the most prominent positions, preening in the radiance of public flattery, receiving honorary degrees, and getting called 'Doctor' and 'Reverend.' These verses led me to look back at

myself: What I have done and how I have lived as pastor and as one of many Christians. Am I doing it right? Did I keep my conscience before God? Am I not ashamed in front of God?

(Slide 4) Last Thursday, Carol Prudhon and I participated in the Wisconsin Annual Conference meeting which is the annual meeting of all Wisconsin UM churches. It was not only about reporting what we have done as one denominational body beyond the local church level and what we are going to do next year, but also about celebrating the life (joys in our ministries) of all the UM churches together. Although as the local church, sometimes we lack human and financial resources, we have done so many things for the kingdom of God by supporting local communities and world-wide mission and sharing God's love with one another. This was possible because we never wanted to be exalted ourselves and served by others, but to be humble and serve others as Jesus taught us. I hope and pray that our church is a loving and caring community for all. Jesus never taught us about religion. Christianity was not started as a religion, but it was begun as a movement by following the lifestyle of Jesus. Since Jesus always tried to introduce and teach the kingdom of God to the world by living as a servant leader, we – Christians – also follow this Jesus called us to serve others with a Christ-like attitude. As he never wanted to be exalted and served by others, he called each one of us to be humble and serve others.

(Slide 5) Last week, we had an opportunity to listen to the church finance report from Al Schneider who is the chairperson of CLC. When people hear the word “church finance” and “commitment”, they automatically think about the offering, so sometimes they feel burden and frustration. Yes, offering is a part of it, but we should remember that offering is not all about commitment. Personally, since I grew up with grandmother who was very strict Christian, so many things became my natural habit: praying before eating, giving tithe along with first fruits, general and special offerings, not being absent or late for Sunday School & worship service, being involved in church events and volunteer service as much as I can, and so on. I don't think that you only become a

good Christian when you follow all of those things.

There are so many ways of showing our commitment. By our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness, we can participate in the work of the kingdom of God. To show more commitment to God, first of all, you can start with being present. The presence of each one of us means a lot in God's sight and also for our church community. Especially, youth and young adults – young families, personally I believe that your presence is truly amazing. Only with your presence, it is like you are offering a million dollars to God, because God knows how many temptations and difficulties you have to overcome just to be present here. We all know that we can at least start to pray. In your prayer, you ask God what you can do more for God's kingdom. Then, Holy Spirit leads you the best way. For some people, it is praying more for others. For some people, it is being present more for church service and events. For some people, it is increasing your giving to the offering. For some people, it is serving in the nursery, Sunday school, and various committees of the church. You can do one of them or many of them or all of them or try something new.

But before thinking about commitment, please don't forget that you should make prayer your foundation. If you make prayer your foundation to think about your commitment, though you may think it will be hard or impossible, God makes it easy and possible. Jesus never taught us only by talking, but his teaching was always accompanied by actions. He showed us how we live in this world. It is very simple and easy, live with Christ-like attitude. In all your words, actions, and decisions, just think about one thing – is it Christ-like? Jesus came to this world not to be exalted or be served by others. Jesus always humbled himself and he always served others. Along with prayer, this Christ-like attitude should be our foundation of life. Then, the word "commitment" is no longer problematic or burdensome to you. But rather, you are more eager to do something to be humble and serve others for the Kingdom of God.

(Slide 6) Today is All Saint's Sunday, which is the day to remember our saints at the church. Last Tuesday, I heard that Christine Hammon passed away. I was so sad. I wept and cried when I heard and my heart is still being broken. I love my work to serve God and the congregation as the pastor. As a faithful Christian, I know very well Christine Hammon is now in heaven with God and spending her new time without illness, pain and any medical struggles. However, as a human being, it is so hard and tough to lose my beloved, faithful and dedicated church family (she was not only one of my parishioners but also my church grandmother). To be honest, her commitment, love and dedication to us and to the church will always remain in our hearts and minds. Also, it is our holy duty to carry on her love, dedication and faith to the next generation. It is the reason why we need to celebrate All Saints Sunday to remember our Saints' names while memorizing their commitment for the future.

(Slide 7) Don't try to feed yourself with long chopsticks, feed others first. This is what a meal in heaven looks like. Be humble and serve others this is the way of living in the kingdom of God.

Praise God! Amen.