

Sermon John 13:1-17 Philippians 2:12-18 March 9, 2008

Living Christ Ways - The Fruits of Faithfulness

#5 Service - Work the Word, Walk the Talk

What wondrous Love is this that caused the Lord of Bliss to bear the heavy cross for my soul? And ... the signs of that love, in Christ, were there in Jesus' life before he bore the cross. Among other acts of service - he bent his knees and washed the feet of his disciples. And before that he blessed children, and he healed the sick, and he fed the hungry, and the hungry. and he set people free from evil spirits and evil ways.

Jesus worked the word he preached, he walked the word he talked. He personified the idea that service to others could serve God and change the world. And the Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, put all this into words for us to hear and to heed.

Philippians 2:12-18

Where do we get the best measure of our true worth as human beings? How do we know that we have value, that our lives count, that it matters that we live and breathe and have our being? How do we find the greatest deepest satisfaction in our lives? And - not just occupy space and fill up a place?

How do we make Paul's word true for us - *It is God who is at work in you enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure - You shine like stars by holding fast to the word of life* What greases the wheels of any human society, making it work to its best? What helps make another person more valuable in your sight? And what makes you of value to others.

To put it simply - isn't it the good you do for some one - or they do for you - that counts most? Isn't the kind of service you and I perform? And isn't this our call in life, to discover - that in serving others we find our greatest fulfillment and joy and the deepest meaning for our lives?

And in this day when we have come as a society, and as individuals, to value in very strange and disturbing ways the importance of persons to us, we need to look at our value system. Millions for 19 year old sports phenoms, and thousands, if that, to teachers and day care workers and nursing home staff,, maybe it is critical that we look again at, and think again about, what true service is all about.

Let us pray -

Lord, may the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your loving and faithful people, be acceptable in your sight and your good word to us in Christ this day. Amen

What wondrous love is this - the Lord of bliss - bore the cross

*In Christ shall true hearts everywhere their high communion find, his service is
the golden cord close binding all human kind.*

A fruit of faithfulness to God - Service - Working the Word, Walking the Talk And I heard about the truth of all this, about service, from several members of the Mission Team to Honduras - the power of service offered to bind us with one another.

Dodie mentioned it. David talked about it. The moving nature of this experience. Our team went to serve the needs of others - children suffering from AIDS - and with your support in prayers and dollars, they did.

And serving the needs of others does build some cords, gold like, of care and concern and love for those you come to know in their need. But it was this idea of service turned upside down in Honduras that proved the Biblical points of view about service as a fruit of faithfulness to God.

Near the end of the Team's stay they went with some of the children to visit a near by Nursing Home type facility. They went to help brighten the lives of the senior citizens and physically and mentally challenged people who were living there. And they did...

You've seen the effect, the positive enlivening smile generating effect, that children can have on senior citizens - that children, at least in small doses, can have on us all. Just double this positive enlivening effect for Senior Citizens in Honduras where few or none of the activities or care options that we know here, are available.

While they were there it was meal time, and several of our team members have shared the wonder of what happened then. The children, and our team members, helped to feed some of the most incapacitated of the seniors. Young children, just beyond being fed by others themselves, helping older adults to eat - Service - turned upside down.

Service - Christ like service. Working the Word of God - feed my sheep Jesus said to his disciples. And it was happening. Walk the talk - If you do it to one of the least of these members of my family, you do it to me.

Service - foot washing, food sharing, seeing a need and meeting it. Service - In Christ shall true hearts everywhere their high communion find - His service is the golden cord close finding all mankind. Children, HIV positive, in some cases abandoned because their parents are too ill or dead... Children - and senior citizens institutionalized because they are too sick or too old or AIDS infected, or alone because AIDS has taken their children -

But - through simple acts of faithful service, working the word and walking the talk of Christian faith, each was bound to the other, each finding new moments of meaning, even joy, in their lives. Service.

And our mission team members? Living now with new and powerfully blessed images of how all human kind could be brought more nearly together as one people.

In Philippians Paul wrote about service - about Christ's humbling himself - taking on human form and not counting himself equal with God, but rather taking on himself the role of a servant, a slave. And Paul talked about servant hood – for slaves to hear, and slave owners, too.

In his letter to Philemon - a slave owner - Paul talked about who was most harmed by slavery. And Paul more than hinted that it was the Slave owner. For all that slaves suffered, and sadly suffer still today in some places in our world, and in our country, yes - slaves in American in 2008, often young women, owned and used by others....

For all that slaves suffer, the slave holder is the one in danger of losing his or her soul, of entering eternal darkness, of losing his or her place as a beloved child of God. Because, if, in this worldly period of life, freedom is not found - and slaves are not freed - the day will come when in life after life the slave owner, the abusive boss, the harsh employer, will, as in Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus - will find himself or herself on the outside of the heavenly kingdom -looking in.

Better the slave than the slave owner – better the servant than the one demanding service.

And - t there is a much more immediate vital value to service - to walking the talk of Christ like care and compassion for others. There is a joy in service, from service, through service - a sense of usefulness and purpose and accomplishment. And a sense of connection with some one who needed you....

It can be a simple thing - for my Mom now - who once ran a business office and church offices, as an executive secretary, simply helping prepare your bulletins each week - helps us and helps her feel connected to this Church and of value to it... Not to mention keeping an eye on me...Service –

Service - not part of a corporate contribution to a community - which is by design good for the company - and good for the good done...

Service - not contracted or paid for - as important as a job well done is - But - a need seen and met.

Service - the simple gift of whatever talent and time we've been given - poured out by us in acts of kindness and care and compassion.

Service - Christ like service - foot washing. No great need, no pressing issue of world shaking crisis. No AIDS epidemic, or Tsunami, or Katrina, no flood earthquake or fire - though from time to time such service is needed.

But simple foot washing became the teaching moment for Jesus...

Do you know what I have done to you? For I have set you an example, Jesus said, That you also should do as I have done to you. If you know these things you are blessed if you do them.

I know one of my concerns for us as a Church is that we have not, I have not, helped us to see how vital it is and must be, that we see both our life together as a Church family, and our presence in the world, as opportunities for Christ like service. Service that is a golden cord.

Too few of us have seen the value in the simple services that make a Church stronger.... Some bulletin stuffers other than the preacher's mom... More people willing to greet and usher - a new crew to regularly clean and dust and polish and touch up and fix up this place which is or should be seen as a very special place

More choir members - lending their gifts to our worship... Stephen ministers, and Sunday School and Logos teachers ...

And all this sounds like institutional maintenance, and not Christ-like service in Honduras or the Gulf Coast - But how far is it from foot washing....

And yes, our service should reach far beyond our life together here... and for some it does. Ft. Street, Baldwin Center, Second Mile Center, Rebuilding Together, South Oakland Shelter, and this June, building a Habitat House in Pontiac.

But we could - more of us should - as a church we should help each other find ways to be of service...

And the good of it... how to measure the good of it? Yes, by feelings of worth and value for those who serve and those served. Yes - by the measures of stronger more caring communities - by homeless sheltered, and hungry fed, and the sick visited. And yes, by the sense of that golden cord of service close binding all of to Christ and to one another .

And yes, most of all, by a deeper, more powerful, more comforting sense of closeness to Jesus Christ, of being his person, of his being our Lord and Savior. Service - it is a fruit of faithfulness to Christ - Work the Word, Walk the Talk.

David W. Robertson, Pastor

