

The Walk: Serve Sunday, 10/3/21

Last week we lifted up God's Word, the Bible, as the primary means by which Christians come to understand God and what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Since Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of God's law, regular reading of the Gospels is an especially crucial foundation of the Christian life. Having centered ourselves on our Master through prayer, worship, and Bible study, our next discipline to explore is service.

In our reading from Joshua this morning¹, Moses puts this cutting question to the people: Who will you serve? God or someone or something else? It's a good question for us to consider today as we talk about service. Sometimes the question we believe we're facing is whether we'll serve. But since each of us was made to serve, we will always choose to serve someone or something. How do you know who or what you're serving? Honestly answer this question. What is it that drives your decision making in the allocation of your time, talent, passion, and money? We all have limited amounts of those things, and so we all must prioritize how we spend them. Sports, cars, retirement, and the other things that occupy our days aren't inherently bad, but we do run the risk of letting them drive our behavior, crowding out all possibility of serving God and neighbor. We'll face the problem of idolatry more generally some other Sunday. For today, the question I want you to ask yourself is not whether you'll serve, but who or what you'll serve.

What does it mean to serve the Lord? The prophet Micah has a concise answer for us. I'm reading from Micah 6, starting in the sixth verse of the New Revised Standard Version.

{Read Micah 6:6-8 NRSV}

As Adam Hamilton notes in his book, *The Walk*, God's work is primarily carried out in this world by people.² Consequently, it should come as no surprise to us that it's impossible to serve God without serving other people. These three characteristics (justice, kindness, and humility) are chief ways that each of us is to think of and respond to God's call on our lives into servant ministry. Random acts of kindness, like buying the Starbucks order for the car behind you in the drive-thru, are good, fun, wholesome ways to bring spontaneous joy into

¹ Joshua 24:14-24. New Living Translation (2nd Edition)

² Adam Hamilton. *The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life*, p. 67. Abingdon (2019).

the world. But our call to servant ministry goes beyond what is fun and convenient. Servant ministry interrupts our routines, costs us of our time, and serves those who can't serve themselves. We engage in servant ministry, not to build ourselves up, but because we believe the good of the Body of Christ often calls for the subordination of our own preferences, pleasures, and schedules. So ask yourself this today: When I serve, am I doing so when it's convenient or to make myself happy, or am I serving sacrificially and to build up the Body of Christ?

A life of servant ministry starts with a love relationship with God and goes well beyond the occasional act of kindness given to those we know and love. We know that we're called to serve, and so we sometimes jump right in, signing up for all kinds of service ministries at church. That only works if the service leads us back to God and we spend the time needed in worship, prayer, and study to deepen our closeness to God. Just like a ripple in water, the strength and motive that we for serving others is only sustainable if replenished by the living water of God's Holy Spirit.

On the challenge cards I have for you in the lobby, there's an option on the back for committing to serving in each of the Rings of Service. What might that look like? Service to God in the center might mean deepening your daily devotional life or attending church on a more frequent basis. Serving your friends or family is something you could easily do weekly, and possibly even daily. Most of our parents are already serving their families sacrificially on a daily basis though meal preparation, taxis service, shopping, and in so many other ways. Serving the church can have varied meanings as well, and we'll get to that in a moment. Serving the community might mean serving on a school board or the Rotary, helping to plan and run an annual festival, or organizing a National Night Out. Serving the world might mean advocating for and practicing environmental justice, financially supporting the education of a child through Common Hope, or packing meals at Feed My Starving Children. The possibilities are only as limited as your passion and imagination. Attending to all these rings of services makes us better rounded servants of Christ and more connected with the breadth of God's creation.

Serving the church is not unimportant. The church remains the primary way that God deploys Christians in ministry to individuals, families, communities, and to the world. What

makes the church unique is both our commitment to put Christ at the center and our reliance on God's Holy Spirit to assemble one working body out of many diversly gifted parts.

Since the church is the Body of Christ, we need all of you, the various parts of the body, to serve. Without your service, the Body is quite literally "dis-membered." We need all the parts, serving sacrificially, for the church to serve God fully. And you need to serve to fully live out your calling and your identity as a part of this body.

This is a portion of what we've called "My Plan for Serving." Its purpose is to spark your imagination with many concrete examples of ways to serve in the church. It's not an exhaustive list. God is constantly raising up new ministries to meet new needs through unique people like you. Some of these ministries are more administrative, some center on worship or Christian discipleship, and many are outreach ministries to the people of Buffalo or beyond.

I'd like each person in the congregation to complete a plan for serving this year and return it to the church office. This isn't a commitment to serve but rather an expression of interest. We'll do our best to connect you with a ministry matching your interest and giftedness and put you in touch with that ministry leader. You received a copy of this form with the annual stewardship letter. We have additional printed forms in the lobby, or you can complete the form online- just head over to the homepage of our website and look for the picture of the man walking on the highwire.

I challenge you to complete your Plan for Serving today, or this week at the latest. How will you grow in servant ministry with Buffalo United Methodist Church?

Humble service was a discipline that our founder, John Wesley, embodied and taught. He and his companions regularly visited the sick and those in prison. That spirit is reflected in his Covenant Prayer, which is a yielding of his life to God's plans. I invite you to pray that covenant prayer with me now as we consider how we'll serve in 2022. Let us pray.

I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee, Exalted for thee or brought low for thee. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.

O Glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, Let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

There are so many simple servant ministries among this congregation that bring me joy to see. The Second Harvest Heartland food distribution that happens literally at our front door every month feeds hungry seniors in our community. The summer reading program gives parents and kids in our community a new way to get out of the house and enjoy the inspiration of good books. Many of you drive one of our Meals on Wheels routes or help serve a meal to a grieving family. Leaving the service early to prepare for Sunday Morning Fellowship is a sacrifice, as is staying after church to lead a Sunday School class. There are too many ministries to list, and each one makes a difference to those being served and the ones who are serving.

Let's come back to the question we started with today. Not "Will you serve," but "Who or what will you serve." We tend to find it natural to serve ourselves, hoping to find happiness in the stuff of this world. But what we really need is the joy that can only come as a fruit of God's Holy Spirit. And that joy is only fully discovered when we use our God-given gifts and resources to sacrificially serve others.

Please take some time now to reflect on how you'll grow in service to God and neighbor.



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