**Sermon Text**: Mark 9:30-37

**Occasion**: 18th Sunday after Pentecost, 22 Sept 2024

**Servant of All?**

Grace, mercy and peace be to you in the name of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

*[Jesus] sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”*(Mark 9:35)

Such a statement like Jesus’ could be considered blasphemy in our culture today. The reason being: we are told to celebrate ourselves for there is no one like us, and we are entitled to everything we desire, and your truth cannot be denied by anyone else’s truth. That is what the world says in contrast to Jesus commending servitude to our neighbours as the greatest calling next to serving God (Mark 12:28-31). The whole of our culture for the past fifty or so years has been ever veering towards a me-first attitude. Should you be called to do something, if there is nothing in it for you, then you should avoid ever participating in it. This is, of course, the exact opposite of Christian thought and the idea of selflessness in general. The Bible cautions us to

***3****Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.****4****Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.* (Php 2)

We do this because, in this way, we live as God has always desired us to live. We live like how He lives. Our Lord has always acted lovingly and selflessly toward us. We need only look to Christ to see this. Although our Lord had more than the wealth of the cosmos, for he created the wealth of the cosmos, he stepped down out of the heavenly realms to grace us with his presence here on earth. Even while on earth, he did not come as one who demands lofty attentions. He did not come as king indulging every pleasure. Our Lord was humbly born in a small town in a manger. He grew up outside the spotlight. And when crowds were following him to and fro in his ministry, Jesus refused them when they tried to give him an earthly throne (John 6:15). His throne was the cross and his crown was thorns. In taking on this humiliation, he selflessly lived for us.

Christ did all that he did in this world in order to be our servant. If there is anyone who can claim to be the first among us, it is our Lord and God. Jesus could have demanded the world fall to its knees the moment he was born and force all of us to live as the lowest of slaves as he sat in an ivory tower. But this is not what happened. He came humbly and lived humbly because his purpose was to reign in love toward us, not love for his own ego. Therefore, he was more than willing to be mired in the midst of sinners and sick-patients that he might offer healing in spirit and body. He willfully went to his own death in agony that by his wounds we may be healed (Isa 53:5). Christ came as Lord and God—he came as the King of All Creation—but he also came in the form of a servant because serving us is the most loving thing he could do.

Likewise, we should not seek self-satisfaction as our primary goal in life. We should seek how we can love our neighbours as ourselves and count them as more significant than us. Christ sets the precedent of sacrifice for our lives. He sacrificed himself that we might have eternal life in him. And now that we live securely as citizens of heaven, let us forsake our worldly desires to serve others here. Let us share the love of Christ to one another and to those outside the Church that all people may receive the love of Christ and come to know the fruits of his cross. It is not about us but about loving those who are the most vulnerable in society.

If you were seeking to serve yourself, who would show love to in this world? Anyone who would return the favour, right? You would suck up to your boss, donate money to shoe-in politicians, and flatter the most beautiful people. We see this all the time in our world and it is all for selfish gain, not out of genuine love. The true measure of our morality as individuals and as a society is not how we treat those who are the greatest among us but how we treat those who are most vulnerable. We should love all our neighbours as ourselves, not just the wealthy and powerful. For who did Christ call and bring in front of the disciples? A child. A child who in that day and age was vulnerable. There were no schools, no pharmacies, and no pediatricians. In the ancient world, about half of children would be dead by age six.[[1]](#footnote-1) Jesus is telling the disciples to care for this child, to love this child, and ensure the child has life offered to him physically and spiritually. That is our calling.

We should be servants to all people. We should help them with their physical and emotional needs as they live in this world. And we most certainly offer them spiritual care so that they may live in the world to come. Absolutely everyone is vulnerable spiritually, even if not everyone is vulnerable socially. We should be spreading the love of Christ and pronouncing Christ’s love to those who need to hear it. Encourage one another in the faith and stir each other up in love and good works (Heb 10:25). Be a servant to the vulnerable and show compassion.

Christ was a servant to all and died for all people out of love for them. There is no one in the world for whom Christ did not offer forgiveness. This is what we thrive on. We were those vulnerable in the faith for we were dead in our trespasses and sins. But Christ died for us regardless. He did not do this that he might gain something from us. We had nothing to offer as precious as his blood, but he shed his blood to cleanse us as a free gift. It was not about looking to himself but servanthood. When we look to Christ on the cross, we know he is the first among the entirety of the Church for he gave his life up for all. He made himself last that we might be first in heaven. Christ is truly our Lord for he made himself a servant to us all.

Yet, these are his actions. We also need to think about our words. We may in fact live like Christ towards our neighbours. We may very well be willing to sacrifice ourselves for them in loving service. When Christ says that the first shall be servants of all, he meant we are servants to all people, including those who persecute us. Christ died for those who called for his death. He loved those who hated him. When we serve all people, we imitate his godliness. But how should we act in godliness toward others? How do we act towards those who hate us? We definitely should be willing to sacrifice of ourselves, but we also need to act with our words.

First and foremost on our lips should be the words of the Gospel. Christ himself declared at the beginning of his ministry that the kingdom of God was at hand. Our servanthood to others should likewise proclaim His love for the kingdom of God. All those who hear and believe in Christ will be saved. None of us should settle for helping one another in the body when helping the soul means life everlasting for those around us. Every last soul needs to hear that Christ served us at the cross so we may live with him forever. This message should be for our best friend and our greatest enemies. Christ died for them all and we are to be servants of all. But this does not mean the Gospel is our only tool for our speech. At times, we need to declare God’s Law.

How did Christ deal with those who acted wrongly? What did he say to the disciples when they were squabbling about who was the greatest? Christ basically declared none of them was great. Here the disciples, each one of whom had cast out demons and healed the sick in Jesus’ name (Mark 6:13), the disciples were not great because they had not received little children. They had not served the most vulnerable in society. They had not placed themselves as lower than the lowest people—making themselves servants of the lowly. They were not great because they loved themselves rather than their neighbours (cf. Mark 10:21-22).

So, now, what do we say in love? Is it out of love that we keep our mouths shut when we deal with hard subjects in our world today? Do we serve our neighbours when we withhold the words of God? Certainly not. When Jesus was confronted with the main issues of his day, he did not mince words. He called sin sin. He called sinners sinners. And those who were willing to hear him repented and were glad for they found forgiveness. Those who were unwilling tried all the more to harm Christ because they desired to add more sin to their sin. Christ still died for those people. Christ died for all sinners. And some of those sinners later repented and believed; Jesus’ brothers, James and Jude, being the most notable examples. Knowing Christ willingly died for those who hated him, we also know he was loving them in his rebukes. He did not want them to die in their sin but live in their repentance. The same must be true for us.

Take, for example, the sin of pride in our society. This sin is what forbids people to admit they do not need to celebrate themselves, nor indulge every whim, nor condemn and cancel anyone who opposes “their” truth. Most people will call this sense of pride narcissism today, and it is definitely rampant. What might we do with these people? We most proclaim the Gospel: Christ has died for them that they may be freed from their sinful pride. Then we proclaim the Law: now be last of all as a servant to all as Christ your Lord is a servant to you. This might not sit well. They will love who they love and hate who they hate. They will not accept a Christ who brings them down from their pedestals to be lower than the low. It is their truth or the highway. And we should at least agree with that notion. They either chose their opinions and regard those opinions as real truth or they will live eternally in Christ who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is a servant to all and offers himself freely to all, but if you reject his Truth for your version of truth, then you live outside of Christ.

Does this mean we stop loving these people? Does this mean we cease to serve them with physical and spiritual help? Of course not. We are servants in Christ’s name and therefore we will love those who hate us, just as Christ loved those who hated him. Our hope in all this is to live in Christ. We live in his example by loving all people as their servant, never compromising on God’s Word. And we live in Christ through faith by constantly receiving his forgiveness, purity, and grace. Christ is and always has been our servant who raises us from sin and death by the power of his cross. Amen.

The peace that surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

1. Voelz, Mark 8:27-16:20, Concordia Commentary , 703. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)