

Sermon Series: “Intentional Disciples—Purposeful Service”—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—4/30/2006

Title: ‘Least of these’ Service

Text: Matthew 25: 31-40

Intro.: *Ills.: Limbo—going lower so that you win*

Theme: To follow Jesus, and what he came to earth to be, means that we must be willing to follow him where he goes in his heart for service which involves us going lower so that others might be raised up through our humble service.

‘Least of these’ service cannot be humanly manufactured

- It is what separates us from the world
 1. **Ills.: What is service**
 2. *I won't be in the world much longer, but they are in the world . . . I have given them your message. But the world has hated them because they are not of the world any more than I belong to the world. John 17:11, 14*
 3. As real as will be the **separation of believer from unbeliever** on the last day of Jesus’ returns (vs. 31-33), so our distinctiveness should be from **the way** the world chooses to serve and **the why** by which the world chooses to serve
- It is gifted into us not originated from us
 1. *“Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’” vs. 34*
 2. We have been **SAVED TO SERVE** — given back an eternal life of opportunities to serve the Father serving others
 3. Looking for the opportunities, today, that were put into motion for you by the Father before you were ever born
- It is more about attitude than action
 1. *“Have this attitude within you which was also in Christ Jesus.” Phil 2: 5*
 2. Rooting out the **mind of the flesh** from our serving
 - a. *For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. Romans 8:5*
 - b. Judgmentalism
 - c. Self-gain
 - d. Résumé stuffing
 - e. One-upmanship
 3. Knowing **WHO YOU ARE** which defines **WHY YOU ACT** which drives **WHAT YOU DO**
 - a. *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you . . . By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Jon 13: 34-35*
 - b. **Ills.: Kingdom values**

‘Least of these’ service involves always having our eyes on Jesus

- *Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. Heb. 12: 2*
- Not fixating on ourselves and our accumulated crowns
 1. Because it will pollute your serving and eventually dismantle it
 - a. Burned out for lack of strength or the inconsistency of the cause (church, social agency, other people disappoint)
 - b. **Ills.: Serving Begins where gratitude and applause end**
 2. Making our service anonymous—even to ourselves (**Read vss. 37-40**)
 - a. *“But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, Matthew 6:3*
- Not fixating on the brokenness of the world
 1. Because it will make you cynical, destroying your desire to help
 - a. Least of these may be outcasts: hungry, thirsty, foreigner, homeless, sick because of sin, convict (**Read 34-36**)
 - b. **Ills.: Church defies order on illegals**
 2. Taking time out for the person not the cause
 - a. *“Visited with care”—“look upon with consideration” vs. 36*
 - b. The gift of time is possible because we have been given back a whole eternity
- Always seeing the face of Jesus in the one we love and serve
 1. Throughout Jesus’ parable the words “for me” scream loudly for our attention
 2. **“For the love of Jesus. . .”** serving whomever, wherever, whenever
 3. *But I thank God, who always leads us in victory because of Christ. Wherever we go, God uses us to make clear what it means to know Christ. It's like a fragrance that fills the air. 2 Cor. 2:14*

Picture showing limbo



What is Service

Self-righteous service comes through human effort. True service comes from a relationship with the divine Other deep inside. Self-righteous service is impressed with the "big deal." True service finds it almost impossible to distinguish the small from the large service. Self-righteous service requires external rewards. True service rests contented in hiddenness. Self-righteous service is highly concerned about results. True service is free of the need to calculate results. Self-righteous service picks and chooses whom to serve. True service is indiscriminate in its ministry. Self-righteous service is affected by moods and whims. True service ministers simply and faithfully because there is a need. Self-righteous service is temporary. True service is a life-style. Self-righteous service is without sensitivity. It insists on meeting the need even when to do so would be destructive. True service can withhold the service as freely as perform it. Self-righteous service fractures community. True service, on the other hand, builds community.

Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline, "The Discipline of Service."

Kingdom Values

While serving as a missionary in Laos, I discovered an illustration of the kingdom of God. Before the colonialists imposed national boundaries, the kings of Laos and Vietnam reached an agreement on taxation in the border areas. Those who ate short-grain rice, built their houses on stilts, and decorated them with Indian-style serpents were considered Laotians. On the other hand, those who ate long-grain rice, built their houses on the ground, and decorated them with Chinese-style dragons were considered Vietnamese. The exact location of a person's home was not what determined his or her nationality. Instead, each person belonged to the kingdom whose cultural values he or she exhibited. So it is with us: we live in the world, but as part of God's kingdom, we are to live according to his kingdom's standards and values. John Hess-Yoder, Portland, Oregon. *Leadership*, Vol. 7, no. 3.

Churches defy order on illegals (ABC News, April 26, 2006)

LOS ANGELES America's faith communities are keeping careful watch as Congress wrangles over border security - a process expected to yield the most dramatic changes in immigration policy since the 1980s - and many religious leaders are not liking what they see so far. Increasingly, they are making their presence felt on Capitol Hill, where the Senate is now drafting its version of immigration reform. In their own churches, synagogues, and mosques, many leaders are striking a defiant pose toward an immigration bill the US House has already approved. At stake is the moral high ground on immigration. The religious leaders see new border-tightening moves as intruding on their obligation to care for strangers - no questions asked. Those who argue the other side, that immigration must be curtailed and the border secured, also couch their position in moral terms, saying it is unprincipled to aid and abet those who have entered the US illegally.

A key sticking point: part of the House measure that would force any individual, including church workers, to see documentation before giving help to immigrants, or risk imprisonment. "It is none of the government's business who and how religious people serve," says Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy, president of Interfaith Alliance, which represents 70 faith traditions. "Would the US Congress have told the Good Samaritan not to help a stranger in the ditch?"

Cardinal Roger Mahony in Los Angeles, who leads the largest Roman Catholic archdiocese in the US, created a stir recently when he said he would order priests under his supervision to defy any federal legislation that requires churches or other social organization to press immigrants for legal papers before giving them help. He also called on Catholics in the archdiocese's 288 parishes to fast, pray, and push politicians for humane immigration reform, inferring that the House reforms fall short in that regard. "The war on terror isn't going to be won through immigration restrictions," Cardinal Mahony said.

Service begins where gratitude and applause end

Timothy Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, writes: Pastors often hear, "I work my fingers to the bone in this church, and what thanks do I get?" Is that the way it is? Your service was for thanks? Are you in your right mind? Servanthood begins where gratitude and applause ends. **Timothy Keller, *Ministries of Mercy* (Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1997), p. 139; submitted by Aaron Goerner, New Hartford**

Matthew 25:31-40

³¹"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

³²All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; ³³and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. ³⁴"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

³⁵For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; ³⁶naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you

came to Me.' ³⁷"Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? ³⁸'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? ³⁹'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' ⁴⁰"The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' [NASB]