

Date: October 17, 2021 (Pentecost 21)

1. Texts: Job 38:1-7; Ps. 104:1-9, 25, 37b; Hebrews 5:1-10; Mark 10:35-45.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: service to others as proclamation.
4. Aim: guide, challenge.
5. Proposition: "Disciples of Jesus proclaim God's honour and glory by serving others."

OUR ATTITUDE OF GLAD SERVITUDE

By now we've all heard enough sermons on the topic and we've read enough articles on the theme. We all know that disciples of Jesus are to have an attitude of servitude. We know that we serve God by serving people. We know that we are to set spiritual ambition and pride aside. We seek God's honour and glory by humbling ourselves. We serve others, even at great cost to ourselves. We know that each disciple is to have an attitude of glad servitude.

We've also become, well, pretty good at carrying this out. We actually do look for opportunities to serve those in need. Sure, it's a little uncomfortable now and then. We find this to particularly be the case when we have to serve someone we don't know or someone whose life choices we don't understand. Fear and anxiety can inhibit our loving service to others, but we still try, for the most part. We live out our attitude of glad servitude.

But, perhaps, we are not as clear on the source of our servitude. Oh, sure, we know that we do this because Jesus did it. That's clear. But there is a deeper motivation for our attitude of servitude.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."¹

The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.²

¹ John 15:12-13.

² Mark 12:29-31.

Our service to others springs from God's love for us and our love for him. Our service to others springs from our love for others. We are to love God with all that we are, which means that we are to love others in the same way. Service is the offspring of love.

So it is that such service must always be self-sacrificing. We sacrifice so that others may experience the abundant life which Jesus promised us.

This truth nudges open a door to another truth: if service is the daughter of love, then she has a twin sister—gratitude. We love God because he first loved us. This creates an attitude of gratitude. We are grateful to God for our salvation and for his grace. We share that salvation and grace with others out of gratitude for God's gifts to us. Gratitude and servitude are twin sisters. They are the offspring of love from and for God.

These are helpful realities. If service to others is proving difficult, then we need only return to our love from and for God. We practice gratitude for all that we have received from God. We will thus be inspired and guided to look for opportunities to share what we have received with others. With a renewed experience of the love from and for God, we will find the encouragement for gratitude and service to others.

It is a complex thing, this attitude of glad servitude. It springs from our individual and collective experience of the saving love of God. Gratitude to God and service to others are joined to one another. Such gratitude and service are to be evangelizing. Glad servitude proclaims God's saving love through acts of service motivated by gratitude.

The practice of this proclamation will not be easy. We don't want to link the receiving of support with the acceptance of our message. Service to others out of love cannot be made conditional. In addition, our society is becoming far less tolerant of evangelism in any form and will label all efforts to link service and proclamation as hypocritical and self-serving.

And exactly to the contrary, service and proclamation are a twinned act of love for the sake of the ones being served. Grateful service to others is, in reality, the exact opposite of hypocritical and self-serving.

At this point some of us will be tempted to just pull up the blankets, turn out the lights and allow the mandate from God to slip out of our consciousness. But we dare not leave people outside of salvation, except by their own freewill.

So, while we help our neighbour go to her vaccine appointment, we chat about how God calls us to love one another in word and deed. We worship with our masks in place and the slippery feel of sanitizer still on our hands.

We deliver a box of Tim Hortons coffee to our local hospital with a handwritten card that says, “God bless you—and I mean that.”

As we deliver a box of food to the food bank, we remark, “I hope God can use this today.” We take a box of new mittens and tuques to the Women’s Shelter and say, “God just nudged me in this direction today.” When we vacuum an elderly neighbour’s home, we share how God has changed our lives, and so self-sacrificing gratitude has replaced self-seeking pride.

We look for opportunities to serve others as a proclamation of God’s saving love. This is just what Christians do as part of the fulfillment of Jesus’ own promise—“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”³ This is exactly what an attitude of glad servitude is all about.

AMEN.

³ John 10:10.