

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Various

"Kingdom Living (6): The Law of Service"

A ROUGH WEEK

All of us, I am sure, were sickened when we heard about the shooting at First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas. Men, women, and children gunned down by a deranged former US airman whose previous run-ins with the law and violent abuse were never put into the background system by the US Air Force - a deadly mistake. Such a shooting hits close to home because it was in a church while people were worshipping the Lord. Certainly, we can ask why in a church, of all places? But the church is not immune from the violence and evil things of this world. There have been mass shootings in post offices, restaurants, malls, schools, government facilities, movie theatres, and, yes, houses of worship. Just as God's blessings of rain and sunshine fall upon the just and unjust elect, so too the evils and calamities of this world fall on both. It is part of living under the curse of sin and death. There will be some things in this life that we will not understand. As the pastor of the church Frank Pomeroy stated, who lost his 14 year old daughter, "*We don't understand why this happened, but we have God that does.*" God is still in charge and is there to help us pick up the pieces and mend this broken world.

Of course, the other response to such a tragedy is to be afraid. We can get paranoid and be fearful of all the things that could happen even in church. But as believers we need to know that God does not trade in fear. It is Satan who wants to instill fear. Satan is the ultimate terrorist. Isn't that the goal of terrorists? To terrorize, to instill fear so that people will freeze and fall under their control. That is how ISIS rules; it is how the Nazis ruled – through fear. But Jesus tells us over and over again in the Gospels not to fear. In fact He says, "Don't fear the one who can kill the body, but fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell." In other words, if you have a healthy fear of the Lord God Almighty, if you respect and revere your Creator, and recognize that He is your Father, and receive the love He has for you in His Son, Jesus Christ, you don't have anything to fear." It is why we read in **1 John 4:18**: that "***perfect love*** (which is the love of God) ***casts out fear.***" It is why Jesus said, "***Don't worry about tomorrow?***" Just seek Me first today. But for those who are murderers, and liars and thieves, for those who do not fear the Lord, they better be very much afraid. They will be judged. So don't fall into Satan's trap, don't be afraid.

And yet, such atrocities remind us that we must be vigilant both in prayer and being proactive. Prayer so that we are under God's care and direction, because we don't know when we will be attacked by the evil one; and being proactive – taking prudent steps to foreguard against evil. So that means as a church we need to make sure we are doing our part in providing a secure environment without disrupting what we normally do every day. In response to the shooting we will take the following steps – I am calling on a mandatory meeting of all ushers to discuss our current procedures when it comes to securing the building, and I will talk with law enforcement to address what can be done to provide a more secure environment. It should be noted that the Vestry this past week after looking at a number of options has voted to install video cameras around the

building and in our nursery. I also like what one church in Mexico, NY (south of Oswego) put on their outside sign this past week. It made national news. Their sign read, "*We Are Not a Gun Free Zone.*" That is certainly another aspect to keep in mind for those who have the license to carry a concealed weapon. So my advice to all Know the Word, Pray, and be Proactive! Now let's look at today's gospel lesson.

CALL NO MAN FATHER? (note I addressed this issue in detail in a sermon given in August of 2011)

Jesus is addressing the problem with the religious leadership in Israel. They have become ineffective, hypocritical, and abusive. As a result, they no longer deserve the right to lead. It is why Jesus says in **Mt. 23:2-12**, "*The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses* (having ultimate authority for the Jews); *3therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.* (They are guilty of hypocrisy) *4They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.* (Their leadership is oppressive) *5But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.* *6They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, 7and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men.* (Being called "Rabbi" or Teacher was the ultimate complement and honor in Judaism – Jesus was called "Rabbi" by His followers) *8But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers.* (do not be called Rabbi in what it has become and in God's eyes and therefore in our eyes everyone should be equally respected and loved) *9Do not call anyone on earth your father* (a title given to rabbis of old – previous generations) ; *for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.* (Do not look put any religious leader in the place of God or hold them to a double standard) *10Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.* (Let no one or anything take the place of Christ – not the Pope or the Church).

So the issue here is not whether or not to use titles – otherwise, if we take Jesus' words literally, we should call NO ONE by any title, even our own fathers! There is no command in the Scriptures that says, "Thou shall not use titles." Rather, the issue is what the titles have come to represent. At that time, the Jews considered rabbis to have the final say on God's Word. Rabbi could mean Teacher, Master or even Lord. Jesus accepted such titles. When He rebuked the rabbis of the day – note the woes that follow in Matthew 23, He in essence was taking away their authority as religious leaders and replacing them as the final authority on God's Word. Only Jesus is to be looked to as the final authority. For He is the only One who has a perfect relationship with His heavenly father.

In addition, at the heart of all positions of authority in life, a humble spirit and a spirit of service to others must predominant. The Bible is not a book of title etiquette; it is a book on God's Kingdom and the principles and laws that govern His Kingdom. That is why Jesus then says, *11But the greatest among you shall be your servant. 12Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.*"

We have been doing a series on Kingdom Living – what are the principles and laws which govern the Kingdom of God? We have already looked at the law of generosity. One could speak of the law of forgiveness and the law of unity and the law of greatness. All flow from the law of love and all result in God's blessing.

Today I want us to reflect on the law of service which in many respects could fall under the law of greatness. ***"Jesus said the greatest among you shall be your servant."*** What does a servant do? He or she serves. When one serves, they are serving someone or something else. They are no longer merely thinking about themselves; they are thinking, actually doing something for others. When we go to a restaurant, we are able to enjoy our meal because of the service of others – whether it be the hostess, the waiter or the cook. When we go to the hospital, we are able to get treatment because of the service of the receptionist, the nurses, and doctors. And ultimately all our service should be done not just for others but for the Lord. It is why the Apostle Paul says in **Col. 3:17: *"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."***

JESUS DEMONSTRATED THE LAW OF SERVICE

Jesus never calls us to be or do that which He already demonstrates Himself. The very fact that Jesus as Paul states, emptied Himself of his deity and took on flesh to become a servant highlights this important truth. It is why Jesus states in **Mt. 20:24-27: *"And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers. 25But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 26"It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; 28just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."***

It is why in **John 13:12-17**, Jesus on the night before He died washed the disciples' feet. He told us why – to give you an example. ***So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13"You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. 14"If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15"For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. 16"Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. 17"If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.***

You see, Jesus didn't come to force or compel people; He came to show people what true love is all about and it involves service to others. When we serve others, we are letting ourselves know, the world know and God know, that we recognize that life is not just about us but it is about others and God and His Kingdom, that love must be demonstrated in tangible action, and that we are here to be a blessing to others as they are a blessing to us.

WHY SERVICE IS PARAMOUNT IN GOD'S KINGDOM

Service allows us to not only help others in tangible ways, thereby demonstrating God's love, but it helps be about something bigger than ourselves. It gives us a purpose that transcends the self. And it is what we were created for. That is why going on a mission trip is so rewarding, not just for those who are served but for those who serve. Or when we go to a soup kitchen or homeless shelter, or a community to help them rebuild after a natural disaster, or when we give a helping hand to a neighbor, or seek to serve others at home, or serve

our brothers and sisters in our church family. God created us for such things. But we won't be able to experience the blessing that comes with service unless we actual do just that: SERVE!

This weekend we are remembering our veterans. Why is Veteran's Day so special? It is an opportunity to recognize the service of our men and women who have served in our Armed Forces. - the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the Air Force, and the Coast Guard – but they are also called the Armed Services. Because being in the military is about serving the country and serving your fellow serviceman. And if you have been in the military, you know there is no room for selfishness. A soldier who is selfish will get himself or worse will get his fellow soldiers killed a lot quicker than one who is putting others before himself. The success of our armed forces is in direct relation to how much each member is willing to give of themselves and serve the mission, their fellow service men and women. There is no room for selfishness. The Medal of Honor winners are always recognized for their selfless devotion to duty without regard for their personal safety or life. And whenever someone is able to demonstrate such selflessness, lives are inevitably saved and battles won.

It is no different in God's Kingdom. The law of service is to be paramount in the lives of those who profess Jesus Christ as Lord. Without such service, His light will not sign through us. So I ask you this day, how are you serving our Lord and God? How are you serving His Church? How are you serving your community and family? It is a vital question to ask on this Veteran's Day but one to ask every day as we seek to serve Christ and let His light shine. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!