

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY

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Scripture: Mark 10:35-45

"Greatness in God's Eye's"

THE CALL TO GODLY SERVICE

What is the key to greatness in God's eyes? The answer to that question lies in the answer to another question: Why did Jesus come to earth? Our Lord came to earth for several reasons – to reveal God to us: His power, His truth, His love and His grace. And in doing so, He showed us the way that leads to eternal life, He paid the penalty of our sins, and He conquered the power of death and the devil. Furthermore, He came to prepare us for the future. But Christ came for one more reason - to give us an example on how to live and how to love. In this morning's Gospel lesson from Mark, Jesus said, *"...but whoever wishes to be great among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

In other words, greatness in God's Kingdom is defined by our service to others and our service to God. In the world, however, greatness is defined by how many people serve you. To whom does the world look to? Chief executives in business and government, kings and queens, generals and the admirals, the rich and famous. But in God's Kingdom, greatness is defined not by how many people serve you but by how many people you serve. You have heard me say it before, the world has its stars, but God has His servants.

On the night before He died, Jesus said in **Jn. 15:12**: *"Just as I have loved you so you must also love one another."* Just a little while before He said this, the Lord washed the disciples feet. He did it to give them an example of what godly service was all about, and one that they would never forget. It encapsulates what we should be about as disciples of Christ. I mean think about it for a moment, the God of the universe washing our dirty feet!

And it is this model of service that has transformed our world. Nowhere else do you find greatness defined by such a way - serving others not for our glory but for the glory of God. You don't find this message front and center anywhere else in history or in any other world religion for that matter. I mean can you imagine the Prophet Mohammed or the Buddha washing someone's feet other than their own?

The truth is the Bible has much to say about godly service. In fact, in God's Word we find there are five principles that are the foundation for godly service. I want us to briefly look at them.

IT BEGINS IN THE HEART

First, godly service begins in the heart. Please turn with me to **Philippians 2:3-8**. The Apostle Paul writes: *³Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but*

also for the interests of others. ⁵Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Godly service is grounded in selflessness. No longer is my life about my needs, my wants, my plans. It is first about God's will, and second the needs of others. It is understanding who we are as sinners and who we are as children of God. It is cultivating an attitude of selflessness in our minds that then translates into service to others and to the Lord. Notice Who it is who demonstrates this and gives us an example - the Lord Jesus Christ - who gave up His rights and privileges as the Son of God to become flesh and walk among us.

IT FLOWS FROM THE FULLNESS OF GOD

Now what else is true about godly service? It not only begins in the heart but it flows from the fullness of God's power. That's the second principle. Jesus served from a place of fullness. **John 13:3** says, "*Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning God.*" Jesus knew who He was and where he was going. He knew that he was the Son of God and that ultimately he would return to his heavenly Father. This confident awareness of his identity and destiny – His place of fullness – enabled him to serve freely. And Jesus promised us the Holy Spirit, His Spirit, to enable us to serve from this place of fullness.

Now if I am going to be full of the Holy Spirit, then I need to take time out to be filled. And that means to spending time alone with the Lord in prayer and in His Word. Many of our members have mentioned to me how blessed they were in spending an hour in our new Prayer Room on the second floor. We need that one on one time with God to recharge our batteries. However, we have a tendency to complicate our lives, to load up on this thing or that thing. There is a reason why God gave us a Sabbath Rest. There is a reason why Jesus left the crowds to go and pray and be alone with His Father.

To know oneself is to know one's limits. Jesus in His earthly body knew His limits. He often put others first and served people unselfishly, unconditionally, and sacrificially. But there were times when he stopped serving and took off into the hills to rest and replenish his body and spirit.

God knows that we need rest, He knows that we need to be able to relax, and He knows that we need to spend time with Him to recharge our batteries. Joyful service happens when our own needs are satisfied in such a way that we can forget about ourselves and concentrate on the needs of others.

Make time to rest and relax. Make time to do what you enjoy. Make time to be with God. Renew your body and spirit so you can take your eyes off yourself and look at where you can use your gifts and passion to serve God by serving others.

IT INVOLVES A CHOICE

Third, godly service involves a choice. God has given us free will. We are free to choose whom we will serve. The Word of God says "*you are a slave of the one whom you obey.*" (Rom. 6:16).

Last week, Fr. Commins spoke of the acronym JOY – Jesus first, others second, yourself last. If we are to have true and lasting joy, it means keeping Jesus first, and that means obeying God's commandments. Listen, for a moment to the Word of the Lord. In **John 15:10, 11**, Jesus said, "*If you obey my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*" You see we can either be self-serving – we can do things for selfish reasons – and at best experience momentary happiness or we can serve God by serving others. We can do what God wants us to do and what He calls us to do, thereby experiencing the joy of the Lord. The joy of the Lord is real and lasting. It is not merely determinant upon our circumstances - that's happiness. Joy goes deeper. Joy is knowing that God is with you and is supporting you every step of the way even though things are tough. Joy is knowing that in the end all things work together for good for those who love the Lord! In fact, Jesus again is our example. In **Heb. 12:2** it says, "*fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross...*"

And so the choice is clear for all who would follow. Will we choose to serve God, first, and others second or will we merely look after our own personal interests?

IT HAS A POSITIVE IMPACT

Godly service means something else. It always has a positive impact on those it seeks to serve. You know it's interesting, but even the secular world has recognized the benefits of service before self. In fact, for example, the US Air Force has as one of its core values *service before self*. Or if you have ever seen the door on an LAPD police cruiser you'll see under the city seal the words, "*To Protect and to Serve.*" The truth is if you look at any profession that serves others, they will highlight the fact that the mission, and the people they serve and those they serve with, always comes before self. Why? It will make any organization a success.

That is why a selfless attitude and serving action must begin in the home. Our first responsibility to show true love and service is to our family members and loved ones. I always share with couples who are about to be married that if their love for one another is going to grow they need to be serving one another with a selfless attitude. This will not only benefit their relationship but impact their kids. For children don't need to be taught how to be selfish. Rather they need to be shown how to be selfless and that can only come about if their parents are modeling such selflessness. Second, our service should impact our church. Think of what has happened in the last ten months here among our own church family? How so many have given of themselves, their time and effort to serve the greater needs of the body of Christ. We have been able to do what we have done because of the service and selflessness of our many members. And then our service should continue to our friends, neighbors, classmates and co-

workers and even to strangers. Jesus affirmed the call to serve strangers in His parable of the Good Samaritan. Such service always impacts people for good.

IT BRINGS GLORY TO JESUS CHRIST

Finally, godly service is that service which brings glory to Jesus Christ. This is the fifth principle. The world often appreciates those who serve, but if you notice to whom does the world give glory? The person serving. Attention is always brought to the one who serves. Not so in the Kingdom. In God's Kingdom, the attention always must go back to God. Jesus modeled this. He said He came to glorify the Father. And He said that we were to do the same (*Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven*). Moreover, we are to be witnesses for Christ. In other words, we are to let people know about the truth and love of God found in Jesus as we serve.

You see if I am serving and not giving glory to God, who then gets the glory – me. And that is not godly service. The praise should go back to God. Now there is nothing wrong with accepting praise but we must always show our gratitude to God. Why? First, it keeps us from thinking more highly than we ought to think of ourselves. And second, it reminds others that the reason why we are doing what we are doing in the first place: it is because of God's grace and His work in our lives. Of course we at times will get resistance. Jesus said, "*The servant is not greater than his master, if they persecuted me, they will persecute you.*" But the good news is for everyone who opposes us there will be many more who will be transformed by our service.

Now in closing, I want to leave you with a challenge. I want you to think first about your attitude. Are you cultivating a selfless attitude before God? How is your attitude toward your family members, your brothers and sisters in Christ, your coworkers, your neighbors and to the general public? Second, are you actually getting alone with God to get spiritually recharged? Are you in His Word and in prayer every day? Third, what do you do to actually serve others? And fourth, when you serve others, do they know you are a Christian? Does your service point others to Jesus Christ? These questions we need to ask if we are to be true servants of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you want to be great in God's eyes? Jesus told us how: *we must be a servant of all*. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!