

Sermon for 03/25/07

ONE ANOTHER: Christians SERVE One Another – Part 3 –

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, AMEN

Main Theme: Christians are different. Not just because we worship Christ – but because of the way we are to treat one another. We are to LOVE (agape) one another. How? By SERVING one another. In this 3rd of 3 sermons we see that God’s call to “serve” clashes with the world’s call for us to be “consumers.” We’ll look at 4 questions that will reveal whether we are sincere servers, and recognize that the key determiner of whether you truly have the heart of a servant is how you react when someone treats you like one. Church membership requires dedication to servant-hood. If we fall short, asking God to help us will empower us to serve in ways we are 1) universally capable, and 2) uniquely prepared! He can also help us past 3 “barriers to availability” (self-centeredness, perfectionism, and materialism). We can serve one another in love as we receive Christ’s purpose and grace in our hearts!

1) CONSUMER! Turn on the TV today, and you will discover that our capitalistic culture expects only **one major thing** from you and me: **be a consumer!** Without always being aware of it, we are molded by the constant impact of that message. We learn to value our employment – it’s our key to **consuming**. If we don’t earn enough, then seek credit to further our **consuming**. “**Keeping up with the Jones**” is a nation wide phenomenon. And every commercial promises that **consuming** their product will make us satisfied, fulfilled, sexy, powerful, and happier. 24/7, millions of voices call us to be **consumers** – but ask yourself: when was the last time our materialist culture asked you and me to **give of ourselves?** For the past two weeks, God has tried to break through all the worldly noise to call us to a **different purpose**. Instead of **consumerism**, He calls us to be servants of one another in love. The **Agape love** He speaks of is different than any other love, for it is unconditional, sacrificial, selfless, humble, willing to place God and others ahead of ourselves, and asks for nothing in return. God’s nature clashes with **consumerism**; revealing that **true happiness** is **NOT** based on what you get, but on what you give.

2) **SINCERE SERVICE!** Today, God calls us to *search ourselves*: “Am I growing in my faith by progressively moving away from consumerism and into servant-hood?” “Do I even want to follow Christ into a *servant lifestyle* that so fervently opposes the culture into which I have been born?” “Can I trust that what Jesus says is true?” After all, look at what we discovered last week: **Sincere service** A) ...comes from maintaining the right attitude, (a *Christ-like* attitude), B) ...needs no external rewards, C) ...does not pick and choose, D) ...is a “choice” and happens whether we “feel” that we want to or not, E) ...generously gives time, talents, and treasures to one another, F) ...does not distinguish the small from the large service, G) ...draws its power from the Holy Spirit, H) ...is a life-style, I) ...is not always fun or easy, and J) ...never ends. Of course, “*believing*” that these statements are true, does necessarily mean they “*define*” our daily actions. *Professing* a truth and *applying* it to daily living are two different things! So today, in terms of **sincere service**, are we where God can take us in our journey to be more Christ-like?

3) **HOW/WHAT?** It helps to evaluate our **attitude** towards servant-hood with some *penetrating questions!* Like... **First, A) How do you respond when no one acknowledges what you did?** Are you disappointed? Angry? Or are you content to be a blessing to others, even if they don't thank you? ...if they don't even know what you did? **B) How do you react when others take your service for granted, or order you around?** C) **How do you feel when someone criticizes something you did for them?** Or condemns you for trying to help? Do you get angry? Do you say, “*That's the last time I'll help them!*” **D) What if the service you're being asked to render is something inconvenient or unpleasant?**

4) **HEART OF A SERVANT?** Last week we discussed that “true service” needs no external rewards; that our *true reward* is our relationship with Jesus. Think about the most *mature Christians* who *touched your life* in selfless service; did they need other people to see and appreciate their efforts? Did they need **human applause**? They didn't, did they! Do you? Our Christian heroes had the **heart of a servant**, but weren't always *treated well*; often people took advantage of them, or took them for granted. But did it *ruffle their feathers*? Surprisingly no! Perhaps that's why a wise man once said, “**The key determiner of whether you truly have the heart of a servant is how you react when someone treats you like one.**” When some one treats you like a servant – do you take offense? Or do you take it as a **positive confirmation** that Christ, *the servant King*, is *living* in your heart?

5) **TREATED BADLY!** It's a fact that many prideful people, broken people, addicted people, wounded people... will often *lash out* at those who dare to **love, care, or serve** them. Jesus experienced being **treated badly**, yet, He cast our demons and healed people **anyway!** Anyone ever waited on tables? Then you *know* that while most folks treat you well, others never look you in the eye, ignore you, or bark out orders and complaints, and treat you as inferior; causing some servers to “accidentally pour coffee in their laps”! Yet others let this behavior *slide off them* like ‘water off a duck’s back.’ Remember: "**The key determiner of whether you truly have the heart of a servant is how you react when someone treats you like one.**" When Jesus was *ignored, criticized, treated badly*, ... did He get angry, stomp off and quit? Wonder why then, we see this so often in the church?

6) **20-80!** The “**20-80 rule**” says that in the average church **20%** of the members do **80%** of the *servings!* That means **80%** still need to *grow spiritually* in order to become the faithful servants they were *designed* to be. Those **80%** are spread out along the line that describes the journey from church “**consumer**” to church “**server**”. (*Point to the line on the power point*) Now, you tell me; at which end of this line are you most likely to find those people who *easily get ticked off* and quit the church to become *perpetual church hoppers*? Right! Those still wrapped up in **worldly consumerism**. Experience tells us it will **NOT** be those **20%**! It will **NOT** be *sincere servants* – because they put *the needs of others* **ahead of themselves!**

7) **SERVANTS DO NOT...** An author once suggested **the spirit of servant-hood** is **NOT** present: 1) When a player who *isn't chosen to start*, quits the team, 2) When we're *passed over* for a promotion and refuse to work as hard for the company, 3) When we're *criticized as a leader* in the church, and we refuse to ever help again, or 4) When we give our idea and it's decided to *go in a different direction*, so we refuse to support the decision with our time, talent, or treasures. Sincere **servants do not** have to “*win*” or be *in the majority* to serve! Sincere **servants do not** *stomp off* and *quit*! Question: As Christ lives *more and more* in our hearts – will we find “**pride**” increasing or decreasing? As we become *more* Christ-like, will “*pouting*”, “*anger*”, and “*quitting*” increase or decrease? Sincere **servants do not** always have to get their way. Sincere **servants do not** need praise, don't get miffed if ignored, or quit when criticized, or avoid the hard or unpleasant jobs. *Why?* They serve *to make Christ smile!* Everything they need, they *get* from Him!

8) **THE WAY OF GOD!** Friends, I know being a sincere servant **isn't easy**, but reflect on **the way Jesus responds** when we *forget* to acknowledge what He did for us on the cross! Or when we *take Him for granted!* Or when we *criticize* one of His decisions! Or what if He *hadn't* saved us because being beaten, ridiculed, and crucified was deemed “**inconvenient and unpleasant**”? Thankfully Jesus, *motivated by gracious and amazing love* continues to **serve us anyway!** It is **the WAY of God** – and if we invite Jesus into our hearts, it can become **our way** too!

9) **MEMBERSHIP = SERVANT!** There was a time when **membership** in the church was as *easy* as signing your name on a sheet of paper. The idea was to make **membership** *painless*, and *undemanding*. Many thought this was *good evangelism*; assuming that all *warm bodies* would then grow into **strong disciples**. No longer. You who have joined in recent years know we have **raised the bar** for **membership**, to the point that in almost every new member's class, *someone* sees the **servant-hood expectations** and chooses **not** to join at that time. And I bless that decision! Why? Because **membership** carries with it the **heavy burden** of **committed servant-hood**. It means *rolling up* your sleeves, *picking up* your cross, and *joining Christ* in **servicing others**. Until you are at that point of *wanting* to move from *consumerism* to **servant-hood**, the *best place* for “regular worshippers” is in **bible classes**, *seeking out* the “heart of Christ”, until over time we're **moved** by the Spirit to fully *dedicate ourselves* as **members** to a new life-style of **servant-hood!**

10) **ENGLANDS!** An example: when Ed and Myra **England** started visiting here years ago, they came *occasionally* – *testing the waters* so to speak. They encountered **caring people**, and *over time* their hearts were **moved** by the loving **Word of God!** Slowly *spiritual growth* become *more and more* important to them. But the **Englands** were encouraged **not** to join *until* they were **sure** in their own hearts that they were **ready to commit** to a lifestyle of **servant-hood**. You see, according to God, the **way we serve Him**, is **to serve one another**. So when the **England's DID** choose to become **members**, they were ready to move from **consumer** to **servant!** And as most of you know – they jumped into the **property and management ministry** in this congregation – and **we have been blessed by it!**

11) **ASK HIM!** *Everyone of you* who (long ago or recently) stood up here and became a **member**, **pledged** to **serve God**, by **servicing this congregation** and **the community** we live in. I challenge you this morning to **re-examine** that pledge by glancing at the people on the *other side* of this sanctuary and **ask Him**, “**Lord, how am I *servicing* them?**” “**How are their lives *blessed* by how I use my time, talent, treasures?**” “**Or have I slipped back into just being a *consumer*?**” Then look around at our community, and **ask Him** – “**Lord, how am I *servicing* your children who live around me?**” “**Is this community *a better place* because of what I am doing in Jesus' name?**” If you can't answer those questions *quickly* and *easily*, it's time to have a **long talk with Jesus** again! ...to **ask Him** to **redirect** your steps, **empower** your heart, and **guide you** into an active **lifestyle of servant-hood!** **Ask Him**, and He will **bless you to be a blessing** to others! **Ask Him**, and you will know a **greater joy** and **purpose** than ever before! Just **ask Him!**

12) UNIVERSALLY CAPABLE/UNIQUELY PREPARED! Know this; there are service possibilities for which we are **universally capable**. That is, opportunities that **any** and **all of us** can answer. No *special skills* required! A person walks into our church – and **any of us** can greet them and pray for them that week. Someone goes into the *hospital*, and **any of us** can hold them in prayer; **any of us** can answer a need they'll face: mow their lawn, take a meal by the house, visit them in the hospital to lift their spirits. **BUT** there are *also* opportunities for ministry for which we are **uniquely prepared**. God gives you *specific spiritual gifts* and **unique** life experiences. And there are times when God wants to use **you**, and perhaps **exclusively you**, to demonstrate His *grace* to someone in a *personal* and *powerful* way. There will be times when you alone have the **exact tools** He needs to make His love known. Do **not** limit yourself – be open to **both** those opportunities for ministry for which we are 1) **universally capable**, and 2) **uniquely prepared** for!

13) 3 BARRIERS TO AVAILABILITY! It was revealed last week that our **time** and **schedules** belong to God, and that it's *very important* to be **available** when needed! Opportunities to serve often come when least expected, so living a **simplified lifestyle** so as to be **available** when God calls is essential. A *complicated lifestyle* creates **barriers** to serving! There are at least **3** other **"Barriers to Availability"**:

a) The first is obvious: **SELF-CENTEREDNESS**. Jesus tells us in **Luke (9:23-24)** ...**"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."** You and I were *born* **self-centered**, but with God's help, we don't have to **stay** that way! When we *recognize* our **selfish ways** and *open ourselves* to the Lord, the Holy Spirit is *eager* and *capable* of transforming **self-centered** hearts! Then **1st Corinthians 5:17** can apply to us: **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"**

b) The 2nd Barrier to Availability is **PERFECTIONISM**. I cannot tell you how many people I have talked to who are *afraid to serve* until they feel they can do it **perfectly**. **"If you wait for perfect conditions, you'll never get anything done."** **Eccl. 11:4 (NLT)** Until you arrive in *heaven*, you will **never** be **perfect**, so chill out, and just **plunge** into *servant-hood*; there is **nothing wrong** with "on the job training!"

c) The 3rd Barrier: **MATERIALISM**. We revealed last week that the hardest resource to apply to servant-hood is our **material** possessions. Remember, **"No servant can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and money."** **Luke 16:13 (NIV)**. Question: Can you be *free to serve others* as Christ did, if you're stuck in *consumerism* mode, chasing after **materialism**? When it comes to these 3 barriers, **Jesus** can do what **we** cannot do for ourselves; **free us** ...and **empower us** to be *readily available* to **serve Him** by *serving one another* in love!

14) **A STORY!** There's a story about a woman who *received a letter from Jesus* telling of His pending visit. Living modestly, she cleaned her small apartment and took her few coins to the store to *buy something to serve* to Jesus when He arrived. On the way home, she encountered a homeless woman who had *hungry* children and so she gave her groceries to her. Going further, she saw a street person *shivering* in the cold and she took off her coat and *gave it* to her. She had given away *everything*, and worried about what she would do when Jesus came? When she arrived home she found a note in her mailbox *thanking her* for the warm coat and the food and it was signed, “**your friend, Jesus.**” Is that your story too?

15) **CHRIST!** Christ surrounds us now in order to *transform us* into servants, that we might follow His example. “**He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.**” (1 Peter 2:24) Christ *bore a burden* that wasn't His! He bore the guilt of our sin when He was put to death on the cross, so that those who place their *faith in Him* can have forgiveness and eternal life. It *wasn't convenient*; it *wasn't comfortable*; it *wasn't* anything we can pay Him back for. His **service of sacrifice** was a pure act of undeserved grace and *love*. When you *serve one another*, you are imitating our Jesus Christ, and *building His body*, the church.

16) **PURPOSE AND GRACE!** Friends, 2nd Timothy 1:9 calls us to join with God ... “**who has saved us and called us to a holy life - not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus...**” So grace-driven sincere service comes from the Lord - from the desire placed in your heart by God Almighty. He comes to *enable you* to serve out of the tugging on your hearts by the *Holy Spirit* and for no other reason! If you and I *pray to Christ* to be sincere servants, and *look for daily opportunities* to serve, God will show us where He wants us and will empower us to be *available* to Him. Moving us from a lifestyle of consumerism to servanthood, He and *He alone* will provide us with His purpose, a heart full of grace, and a soul generated by love to *serve one another!* **Praise God! AMEN**

Sermon/Confessional Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, we confess that it so easy for us to be consumers of your love, your church, and the blessings of your creation. But we often forget that you give us these good things to pass on to others. We admit to selfishly administering to our own needs and not the needs of others in a way that reflects your giving nature. Forgive us and come free us from those barriers like self-centeredness, perfectionism, materialism that are preventing us from being available to serve one another in love.

Lord, sometimes we forget that our relationship with you is why we serve, and so we get discouraged and quit if ignored, or criticized, or taken for granted. We often forget that we pledged in our membership here at All Saint's to dedicate ourselves to serving one another and our community. Forgive us and come into our hearts that we may receive the motivation to live a lifestyle of grace-driven sincere service – and help us to do it faithfully in your name.

And now Lord, although you know us better than we know ourselves, listen as we share in a moment of silence, those other parts of our lives that need to be forgiven, washed clean, healed, and recommitted to you! (made anew.)

(Silence)

Lord, your desire is for your children to grow from consumers to servants. teach us, empower us, and transform us that we live according to your life-giving will! Fill us with your Holy Spirit and teach us to serve one another in the ways of your amazing agape love! In Jesus Name We Pray. AMEN

Assurance of Forgiveness:

Friends, listen to the good news: The Lord, who longs to fill you with His purpose and grace, ...*that* Lord has mercifully heard your confession and eagerly forgives you all your sins. Go now, and remember: you were designed and created for servant-hood! Turn to Him and ask for His help, and you will be blessed with a grace-driven sincere desire to serve! Joy and inner peace will follow! Praise God! AMEN

**Opening prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we stand before you this morning as a result of faithful and giving servants who loved us unto the kingdom of God! It was your servants who taught us to come here to receive grace-filled forgiveness. It was your servants who opened our eyes to the divine power to heal our broken bodies, minds, souls and hearts! It was humble servants who opened us to the Gospel's wisdom and guidance that could direct our steps to true happiness, purpose, and inner peace. We give you thanks this morning for those who brought us awareness of your love and compassion so that we might be embraced by you and made your children. Though undeserving, we come to be immersed in your never ending river of blessing, and ask that you would come live within us that we too might become faithful servants who reflect your grace-filled love in the things we say and do! In Jesus Name we pray!
AMEN!**