

Designed for Service

Luke 9:37-43, Mark 10:42-45

It's always an interesting question to ask children what they want to be when they grow up. Usually you will get the standard answers: I want to be a baseball player, a police officer, a firefighter, a teacher, a doctor, the president...that's why it was a little surprising when 9 year old Tommy responded with an unexpected answer when he was asked what he wanted to be...His reply: Either a garbage collector or a mechanic. Tommy was asked why he chose those vocations, his answer made sense when you think of the world a 9 year old boy: "I like to get my hands dirty." Most mothers spend a good part of their children's childhood combating that fact.

But maybe we shouldn't be so quick to dismiss this inclination of childhood. Because as a follower of Jesus Christ, that is precisely what we've been called to do; Get our hands dirty as a servant of the Lord...to realize that life is more than just taking care of ourselves. Providing for our needs. As a disciple of Jesus, we discover that we are designed for service. As we consider our purpose on this earth, we begin to realize that God has made us to make a difference in this world. The Lord calls us to serve one another. Our salvation is a gift of God's grace, but as we noted when we were looking at Ephesians chapter 2 the result of our faith is this: "For we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works." The Living Bible puts it like this: "It is God himself who has made us what we are and given us new lives from Christ Jesus, and long ages ago he planned that we should spend these lives in helping others."

I would guess most people when asked what they wanted to be when they grew up would not answer: "I want to be a servant. Maybe because servanthood does not rank near the top of the list of most desired professions. I mean what kind of image do you conjure up in your mind when you think of a servant...Maybe someone like a household maid, faithfully carrying out the chores and responsibilities of taking care of someone's home. Or maybe you think of someone doing some menial or lowly task that would be beneath us. Maybe that's why the disciples had a hard time seeing Jesus teach the lesson of servanthood when he took on the very humble task of washing their dirty feet.

And yet this is our calling as one of Jesus' disciples...to be a servant of the Lord.

The apostle Paul uses this word to describe his relationship with Jesus. Romans 1:1 he introduces himself as Paul, a servant of the Lord. The

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word for servant in Greek is “doulos”. Doulos can be translated either servant or slave. In some sense it is really the opposite of Paul’s favorite word for Jesus which was “Kurios” which means Lord. The commentator William Barclay says the word “kurios” describes someone who has an undisputed possession of a person or thing. It means master or owner in the most total and absolute sense. Paul thought of himself as a slave of Jesus Christ, Jesus is my Lord and Master...knowing that Jesus had given his very life for him and how Paul felt he no longer belonged to himself, and that his life was entirely given to Jesus. So what does that mean for you and me? If I am a servant of Jesus Christ, then I acknowledge my life is devoted to that purpose, that it is now a part of who I am...I am a person designed for service.

In the Old Testament the word “doulos” is also used to describe the great persons of faith who served God. Moses was a doulos of the Lord, Joshua was a doulos of the Lord. The title of the prophets often was they were servants of the Lord. So this phrase “servant of the Lord” describes someone who is devoted and surrendered and is also a title of great honor.

So brothers and sisters of the First United Methodist family, each of you who claim the name of the Lord Jesus Christ...you are called to be a doulos, a servant of the Lord, you were designed for service.

In the reading today from the Gospel of Luke you have the story of Jesus encounter with the boy with an unclean spirit. I think it’s interesting that this story comes right after the passage of the transfiguration. What a contrast! Here you have Peter, James and John, experiencing such a glorious moment...Seeing Jesus transfigured before their eyes, catching a glimpse of Jesus in his majesty and glory...and then the next day they come down from the mountain and they face the harsh realities of life...they have to deal with the cries of a father in anguish over his demon-possessed son. But they witness that Jesus came to bring help and healing.

I wonder if sometimes our relationship with the Lord is like that...we come to Jesus, our hearts are changed, we feel the wonder and majesty of who Jesus is, and we may even be on an emotional high, and we wish we could stay on that mountaintop forever, but the truth is we must come down from the mountain, to face the world as it is, to reach out to the needs of others, to get our hands dirty as a servant of the Lord.

This past week, we have all been watching the news of the devastation caused by Hurricane Harvey and heart-wrenching stories of persons

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displaced from their homes and the uncertainty of their futures. But in the midst of such horrible suffering and difficult challenges, there have been story after story of persons reaching out to help someone in need. It is heartening to see stranger helping stranger and to witness the human spirit of pulling together when life seems to be at its worst.

That's who we are called to be in this journey of life...a servant of Jesus Christ...because God has created us for good works, designed us for service. That each person here in this faith community is a *doulos*, a servant of Christ, letting our lives make a difference for the kingdom of God...making a difference in our communities and world. Your life is important to God...you are called make a difference.

The late Peter Marshall, who once served as the chaplain of the United States Senate, used to love to tell the story of "The Keeper of the Spring". It was about a quiet forest dweller who lived high above an Austrian village along the eastern slopes of the Alps. The old gentleman had been hired many years ago by a young town council to clear away the debris from the pools of water up in the mountain crevices that fed the lovely spring flowing through their town. And so with faithful, silent regularity, he patrolled the hills, removed the leaves and branches, and wiped away the silt that would otherwise choke and contaminate the fresh flow of water. Well in time, this village became a popular attraction for vacationers. Graceful swans floated along the crystal clear spring, the millwheels of various businesses located near the water turned day and night, farmlands were naturally irrigated and the view from many restaurants was picturesque beyond description.

Well, the years passed and one evening the town council met for its semiannual meeting. As they reviewed the budget, one man's eye caught the salary figure being paid to this obscure keeper of the spring. The town council member inquired: "Who is this old man and why do we keep him year after year? No one ever sees him. For all we know this strange ranger of the hills is doing us no good. He really isn't needed any longer" And by unanimous vote, they dispensed with old keeper's services. For several weeks nothing changed. But by early autumn, the trees began to shed their leaves. Small branches snapped off and fell into the pools, hindering the rushing flow of sparkling water. One afternoon someone noticed a slight yellowish-brown tint in the spring. A few days later the water was much darker. Within another week, a slimy film covered sections of the water along the bank and a foul odor was soon detected. The millwheels moved slower, some

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finally ground to a halt. The swans left as did the tourists. Clammy fingers of disease and sickness reached deeply into the village.

It was then that the embarrassed council called a special meeting. Realizing their gross error in judgment, they hired back the keeper of the spring...and within a few weeks the river of life began to clear up. The wheels started to turn, and new life returned once again to the hamlet in the Alps.

Well this story may seem like an idle tale, but it certainly carries a relevant and important message for each of us. For what this keeper of the springs meant to the village, we as servants of Christ can mean for our world. For we are created to put our faith into action. We are designed for service...

I was interested in the story of our last hymn...Jesu, Jesu. The composition of the hymn itself is symbolic of collaboration between two cultures. The text comes from a European Christian inspired by his service in Ghana. Following African independence movements throughout the 1960s and 1970s, a number of Western missionaries encouraged the composition of Christian song in African idioms. Thomas S. Colvin (1925-2000) was one of these missionaries. Colvin's missionary ministry was characterized by justice issues such as Christian service committees, refugee resettlement and community development projects. Among his many activities, Colvin participated in community development training in parts of southern Africa and aided refugees from Mozambique seeking sanctuary in neighboring Malawi.

In addition to his missionary service, his experience led him to write texts for hymns. Colvin developed new African congregational songs by adapting local melodies and writing new texts appropriate for African Christians and, as it turns out, Christians around the world. Jesu, Jesu, is probably his most popular. The melody is adapted from a Ghanaian folk song he heard during his years of service in that country.

The hymn reminds us of who we are as servants of Jesus Christ...as we remember the words of Jesus who said...the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve. You and I, servants of the Lord, were designed for service. "Loving puts us on our knees, serving as though we are slaves, this is the way we should live with you. Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love, show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you."