

Nov 24 – Thanksgiving Sunday How Will You Measure Your Life?

By Who and How You Serve

Mark 10:35-45

Today we end our look at how we measure our lives. We have been examining what God views as being really important when we come to the end of our lives. We talked about needing to make love our first priority and how generosity is an expression of what it means to be faithful. We end our examination by getting back to one of the central messages of Jesus' ministry. Jesus always stressed love for others. Right behind that was our call to be a servant. One of the last things he did for his disciples, before his arrest, was to wash their feet as a visible reminder of the importance of servanthood. Yet, it is so hard to accept and live the life of a servant. It is so counter to our culture's values. Today's scripture shows how the disciples who were with Jesus were not "getting it." So, as we see their failings, we are reminded how easy it is for us, and for many who take the name Christian, to get it wrong.

James and John and probably their mom, though Mark left her out in his version of the story, thought that they would get in their bid for power before the other disciples. Jesus kept talking about his kingdom. They imagined all the kingdoms of the world they knew about. You had the ruler. The next most powerful people in the kingdom were the ruler's most trusted advisors, who usually stood at the left and right hands of the ruler when he was meeting with people. From this position they could hear all that was asked of the ruler, give advice and be in the know before everyone else concerning the ruler's decisions. Knowledge is always power. And power brings you wealth. So, James and John ask for those positions. "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. In the Kingdom of Heaven, there is no status seeking. In my Kingdom, we all serve. And, in serving, you are going to likely end up just like me, which in Jesus' case was a cross. Do you really want to be first in this kind of kingdom?

This story is first the story of the allure of privilege and power. We have a good idea, as James and John did, what power, privilege and importance look like. Right now if I were to ask you who are the power brokers in our world you could easily name people, from politicians, to corporate executives, to people of wealth. Down deep, most

of us wish for some of the perks that go with power. This is why it is so attractive. People of faith, the institutional church and more have been seduced by what power and wealth offer.

But Jesus' view was succinct and direct: "that's not the way it will be with you." Jesus said he didn't come to be served, but to serve. We should often ask ourselves, "In what specific ways does living like Jesus change your approach to life?" Following Jesus should be counter cultural. So, one of the ways we measure our lives is by how well we serve. As I have said before in the series, God doesn't care about how much we have but what we do with what we have. God doesn't care how important the world thinks we are. God measures us by how well we follow Jesus' command and example of servanthood.

Jesus gave a word picture of the final judgment. His story about the judgment clearly conveyed his Kingdom's priorities. Kingdom people, he said, care for the hungry and thirsty, the poorly-clothed and strangers, the prisoners and the sick—the people whom Jesus called "the least of these brothers and sisters of mine." Jesus did more than talk about servanthood, he repeatedly demonstrated a servant heart. As I said earlier, Jesus showed his disciples what was important by washing their feet that last night. He did this after they got into another discussion about who was most important. Jesus was asking them through his actions, and we can say he asks us as well, "What is really important in life?" Is it power and wealth or faithfulness to God? We know the answer.

One of our bishops, before he retired, shared how we need to change what Jesus said. Jesus talked often about the Kingdom of God. That gets us thinking about rulers and power and all that other negative stuff. Kingdom talk is seductive and we can end up like James and John thinking about power instead of service. He proclaimed that Jesus invites us really to be a part of the "Kingdom of God." The faith community Jesus was calling us to be is one where relationships matter. It is one where no one is the king but all are encourage to serve and help each other.

Sometimes we serve and sometimes we are served, it all depends upon what is happening in our lives.

So, how well are you measuring your life when it comes to being a servant? Do you see plenty of places where you have been willing to help others? If so, rejoice! Or, are you instead seeing way too many times where place and status were more important to you than they should be? "How well am I serving?" It is an important question to ask ourselves frequently.

This Sunday, since it is just prior to our time of celebrating Thanksgiving, I want us to dwell on this thought. Are you thankful for opportunities to serve? Do you see these opportunities as a blessing or in imposition? Let's be honest. It is hard to always see them as blessings.

Too often, we do things that are labeled service or caring for the least because we have to or we are supposed to. We do it because it is our Christian duty. As good as this is, this is different from what Jesus was asking from us. Jesus wanted us to get into a mindset where we serve because we want to. We serve because we see a need and it is a burden on our heart to do something about it. We serve because we care about others when they are hurting. This kind of servant mindset comes out of the love we have for God. Through that love we are filled with love for others. This love makes us generous with our time and resources because God has been so good to us. There is no self in this. We do not care if we are recognized for what we do. In fact, when someone mentions how our actions were such an inspiration to them, we might be surprised. After all, we were a servant not because we would be recognized but because we saw a need and met it.

When you think about servanthood in this way, how are you measuring up? It takes time, dedication, and lots of seeking for forgiveness to gain a servant's heart. We need forgiveness for those moments when we get too fixed on our needs or the need to be recognized. For this mindset to take root in our lives, we have to struggle against our fear of being used or taken advantage of. None of us have completely

mastered living the servant heart that Christ so vividly showed us through his life. We can always grow in our willingness to serve. The more we do the better we do it! It is never too late to improve.

I think of many people who have been servants in the churches I serve. They do things not because they have to but because God's love for others flow through them. Let me give you one example. What she did seemed like a little thing to her but I saw the ripples her actions made in the life of others and of the church. I have mentioned her before. She made coffee for all the meetings at the church. Since she lived just across the alley from the church, it was an easy thing for her to do. She would come into the office on Monday and write down all of meetings, whether they were church or community, that needed coffee. She would learn how many to expect and then she would have things ready. You walked into the meeting knowing the coffee was on. You left your dirty mugs on a tray and she would be in to clean things up. She never asked for recognition. Yet, her work was so appreciated. That church received notes from community groups all the time thanking us for our hospitality. After I was gone she had to quit and the church and community only then realized what a gift they had been given for over 15 years!

Servanthood is one of the ways we measure our lives. It is making a statement about what is really important. How are you doing? Do we, this day, see those opportunities as reasons to give thanks? We should, because it means God trusts us to take care of the really important things of life.