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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Wednesday, April 6th, 2022

Sermon: In View of God's Mercy: Service

Text: Micah 6:7-8; Mark 10:35-45

Focus: Jesus came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Function: That they would serve others in grateful response to Christ's service of mercy.

Structure: Story-Framed

Locus: "I believe that Jesus Christ... has redeemed me..." (SC, 2nd Article of Apostles' Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Employees at the fast food restaurant Chick-Fil-A are famous for their delightful response to gratitude. "My pleasure!" they say whenever a customer thanks them or shows appreciation. "My pleasure!" It's a joyful phrase, don't you think? Well, the last two times that I went through the drive-thru at the Castle Rock Chick-Fil-A, I have had the same server. And let me tell you: he doesn't say, "My pleasure." He's a young man with a caterpillar mustache *a la* Burt Reynolds (*Aside*: Did you know that the 80's are back?!). Oh, don't get me wrong. He's plenty friendly. He just doesn't say, "My pleasure." Instead he says things like, "Yeah, man, no problem!" and "You bet." This is not the scripted response I have come to expect at Chick-Fil-A. I think I'm going to make it my personal

mission get Mr. Yeah-Man to say, “My pleasure” on my next visit.

After all, as a paying customer, shouldn't I get what I want?

We live in a world where the customer is always right. We want a Burger King world because Burger King promises, “Have it *your way!*” I like having things my way. My way is good. My way is right. It's my way or the highway. And not just when it comes to food. I want everybody else to do things my way too—at home, at church, in all avenues of life.

Human beings are selfish creatures. Generally, we prefer to *be* served and not *to* serve other people (unless we're working an angle for our advantage). Husbands have unrealistic expectations for their wives, and wives have a never-ending “honey do” list. Many parents bully their kids and treat their children like unpaid staff. Bosses bark out orders to employees as though they are generals on a battlefield. Many workers are more concerned about the benefits plan than they are about doing an honest day's work. And in the public square, people expect the government to solve all their problems, as evidenced by the endless entitlement programs we taxpayers must support. We've certainly come

a long way from President Kennedy’s inaugural address, in which he famously said, “Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country.” As Burger King promises, we want to have it *our way!*

Jesus’ disciples were no different than people are today. James and John were brash in their bold request to Jesus: “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory” (Mark 10:37, ESV).¹ In other words, when Jesus came into his kingdom and sat on his throne, they wanted to be his top dogs. They wanted everybody to make a fuss over them and answer their bid and call. They wanted to be elevated over the other disciples—over everyone except Christ himself—so that they could rule the roost.

Their timing couldn’t have been any worse. Jesus had just made his third Passion Prediction—a prophecy of his betrayal, suffering, death, and resurrection (Mark 10:33-34). Jesus gave them the whole game plan for Holy Week—the entire means by which Jesus would save

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

the whole world from sin. But all James and John could think about was how to get a good seat at the table. And when the other ten heard about it, they were furious. Why?! Because they hadn't thought to ask it first, and they were just as jealous and preening as the Sons of Zebedee for a position of influence and power. In fact, on Maundy Thursday, they would argue with one another about which of them was the greatest—right after Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper (cf. Luke 22:24).

So Jesus had to set them straight. He said:

“You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-44).

The apostles' entire emphasis was wrong. They put priority on the wrong things. Position and power shouldn't matter to Christians.

Disciples of Jesus should be concerned with serving *others*—just as Jesus came to serve us by dying on the cross to save us from our sins.

Jesus turned the disciples' delusions of grandeur upside down and inside out. The one who is greatest in the kingdom of God is the one

who serves, not the one who calls the shots. And Jesus was the greatest servant of all.

The prophet Isaiah contains the four famous “Servant Songs” about the Lord’s Messiah. Jesus is the Suffering Servant who endured pain and shame, humiliation and the horror of the cross in order to rescue us from sin, death, and the devil. Jesus is the Son of God. He could have come down and commanded every person on this planet to wait upon him hand and foot. But that wouldn’t help us at all. Jesus didn’t come to enjoy the adulation of the world. Quite the opposite. Jesus came *to serve*—and to give his life as a ransom for many, to take our place and offer up his life in exchange for ours.

Now as the forgiven people of God, we are called to be like our Lord. We are called to glorify God by loving and serving our neighbor—whomever he or she may be. Instead of lording it over other people, we humble ourselves before them. All believers are called to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21, NIV). For the sake of love, we do things we’d otherwise rather not do. We’ll even suffer humiliating and menial tasks—even things outside of our

“job description” in order to bless our family, friends, classmates, and coworkers.

David Peter writes:

“The story is told of an American man who observed the ministry of Mother Teresa. You may recall that in the twentieth century Mother Teresa served the poorest of the poor in Calcutta, India, caring for the sick and desolate in the city streets. The man watched as the diminutive nun, Teresa, embraced a leper in the gutter and cleaned his leprous wounds. The observer, in disgust, declared: ‘I wouldn’t do that for a million dollars.’ Hearing these words, Mother Teresa looked up at the American and replied: ‘Neither would I. But I would gladly do it for Christ.’”²

Mother Theresa reminds us that when we serve others, we’re really serving Christ. We don’t do it for praise or accolades or pats on the back. Nor do we do it in order to make others beholden to us. We do it simply because Christ served us first and now calls us to serve others. In the ultimate act of mercy, Jesus Christ, the ultimate *Servant*, gave *his* life as a ransom for many—as a ransom *for you!* “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for

² David Peter, “Mercy in Service,” in series *In View of God’s Mercy* (Fenton: Creative Communications for the Parish, 2022), digital ed.

the brothers [and sisters]” (1 John 3:16). In the name of the Father and
of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.