

Series Title: BE THE CHURCH

Sermon Title: CALLED TO BE A SERVANT | September 15, 2024

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER:

- **Persecuted Church & Israel: Faith, Fortitude & Wisdom**
 - **Pray For Protection:** Pray for safety and provision for our brothers and sisters across the world that are facing persecution of various forms right now. Pray for those with young children, those facing threats on their life, and those forced to live in hiding.
 - **Pray For Boldness:** *"To not waste the opportunity to share the Gospel."* That God would enable the Church to BE THE CHURCH; to live and preach the Gospel, to love, serve and disciple people towards Jesus no matter what! We are called to be a witness; *"This will be your opportunity to bear witness."* **Luke 21:13**
 - **Pray For Wisdom:** That God would provide supernatural wisdom and strategies for being the Church in any context. Pray for pastors and leaders who are overseeing the Church in these persecuted areas – pray for fortitude, protection and God's guidance!
 - **Pray for Israel:** Pray for peace in Israel and throughout Middle East. That the Jewish people would turn to Jesus as Messiah and Saviour! Pray that the Church would rise up in prayer for Israel. Pray against growing anti-Semitism across the world.

INTRODUCTION:

Last week Pastor Stefan introduced a new sermon series to us called "BE THE CHURCH". This is a great focus as we head into another ministry year. Scripture has much to say on the topic!

- **RECAP:** We have often heard that the church is not *a place*; it's *more than a building* – the church is **the people**. AMEN to that! You are the church. We are the church!
 - **Church = "a called-out assembly of people". Set apart, Holy and Blessed!**
 - Pastor Stefan emphasized last week: **Church = FAMILY**. *God has adopted us into His family*. That makes this a family gathering!!
 - *"In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will..."* Ephesians 1:4-6
 - Of course, this is only one of several analogies that Scripture uses to illustrate the church. The church is a family/household/Holy Nation, while it is also building/temple (made of living stones joined together with Christ as the cornerstone), its a bride (beautifully dressed in white) and it's a body!

With the introduction now behind us, hopefully the tone is set for this series. Now we are free to move forward with the question: **HOW are we to BE THE CHURCH?** There are many paths we could go down in answering that question – but this morning, as a first point of entry, I want to focus in on one particular aspect of being the church – **the call to be a servant!**

- I settled on this topic for today as I feel that it is foundational to the way that we view life in the Kingdom of God, and it shapes our understanding of Church profoundly! If you are a follower of Jesus, as in an apprentice under Him, then **you are called to be a SERVANT!**
- You have received... **The HIGHEST Call to the LOWEST Position!**

A | BE A SERVANT: The HIGHEST Call to the LOWEST Position

The book of Isaiah, written 700 years before Jesus was born, refers to the Messiah as God's "Servant" who will act wisely (Isaiah 52:13). **We know this servant to be Jesus; the Suffering Servant!**

- **Servant is an apt description for Jesus, which is a shocking thing to say!** Servanthood is a humble and *lowly* position, and Jesus is humble and lowly in heart (Matthew 11:28-30).
- A servant is someone who performs duties (or *services*) for others, seeking to put *others* needs before their own. That's Jesus *to a "t"*. Literally... to a rugged tree... to a cross! Jesus came to seek, save, and I'll add **TO SERVE** the lost, which is ultimately demonstrated at the cross.

Matt 20:28, "...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but TO SERVE, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Messiah is described as a KING. A conqueror!... **yet also a servant!? HOW?**

Likewise, in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Have you considered Jesus as a servant, putting *your* needs before His own on the cross? Yet that is precisely what He did! WOW! That's a humbling thought.

- **Pride should be scarce in the house of God**, considering what Jesus has done for us.
- Yet more than the act of *loosing* His life, Jesus demonstrated selfless service in the way he LIVED His life too! Jesus consistently modelled being a servant, putting others needs before his own!

PRIMARY EXAMPLE: Jesus Washes His Disciples Feet... Turn To John 12:3-17

- **Context...** this story takes place on the last night Jesus spends with his disciples, the same night that one of his own (a close friend) would betray him and hand him over to the authorities.
 - o Jesus spends His last evening with His disciples, together around a table. They eat a meal together (the Passover meal), and there He serves them.
 - o *"It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God..."* **Pause: What would you do?** If you had ultimate power, would you use it to serve others? History shows us *clearly* that sinful humanity would not, **but Jesus did!**
- **Continue:** *"...so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him."* **John 13:1-5**
 - o **The stunning magnitude of this moment may be lost on us –so in case it isn't clear, what Jesus is doing here is CRAZY!** It was customary at meals like this for water to be available in a basin at the door for guests to use. Or, on some occasions (say special meals like Passover), **the lowest ranking servant would wash guests feet upon arrival.**
 - o Sandals were common, leaving the feet dusty... and depending on the conditions of the streets, also potentially dirty from mud and/or manure (meaning likely stinky as well).
 - **We don't know why, but this customary basin was not available (or filled) upon arrival.** As David Guzik points out in His commentary on this passage, it could be perhaps that the disciples thought this was strange, yet didn't bring it up for fear

of being appointed as the servant who had to do the washing... so awkwardly, they took their places at the table with dirty feet. It would have felt unusual.

- **Then something even more unusual happens:** During the meal, Jesus, the Master/Rabbi/Most Honoured Guest, rises from His place at the table and removes his outer garment... in only a few hours this same garment that would be stripped from Jesus during his flogging and public execution... Next, Jesus wraps a towel around His waist. **Seriously... what is he doing?**
- We don't know of course... but I like to imagine that at first Jesus' actions go unnoticed, as everyone at the table carries on in conversation... but as Jesus quietly continues to prepare for this act of service, *next filling the basin with water*, the chatter begins to die down...
 - o The confused looks streaked across the faces of those at the table communicate the question everyone is internally asking... **"What is Jesus doing?!"**
- And notice that the passage doesn't say that Jesus makes a grand announcement: **"I am about to do something REALLY HUMBLE! PAY ATTENTION!"** Jesus doesn't do that...
- Also, Guzik further notes – Jesus doesn't call upon someone else to do an object lesson for the group. **Jesus IS THE OBJECT LESSON.** Jesus is hands on, leading by example!
 - o *"If Jesus wanted to just display the image of a servant, He would have had a servant or one of the disciples do all this preparation work. He then would have quickly wiped a damp cloth on a few dirty feet and considered the job done. That would give the image of servanthood and loving leadership, but Jesus gave Himself completely to this work." (Enduring Word Commentary, David Guzik)*

Its only after Jesus has finished this demonstration of selfless servanthood that He returns to the table, and begins to teach His disciples the significance of what He just did.

- **I want you to imagine yourself there...** having your feet washed by Jesus. Now receive these words from Him. Allow yourself to really consider what Jesus is saying to us, His church.
 - o *"When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. 'Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asked them. 'You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. (LOVE THAT!!) Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.'" John 13:12-17*
- **Church, I will say this as simply possible: WE ARE CALLED TO BE SERVANTS. YOU are called to be a servant. Remember,** Jesus is talking to the founders of the Church, a movement that has been growing and spreading for 2000 years, and it's traced right back to Jesus, who is the head.
 - o **Its moments like these that show us, at a molecular level, what the DNA of this 'body', His Church, looks like. Servanthood is at the foundation, the bedrock, of Gods Church!**
 - o **If Jesus were to evaluate your life, what might that report look like?** Would he observe a servants heart (word and deed) that echo's back to the example He set for us? Would he describe you as a humble servant, putting others needs before your own? Would he find a willingness to do the lowest job, the least desirable job? The hardest job? Would he note your willingness to lay down your life, your 'rights' for the sake of others?
 - o **And we should ask the same question of our church – if Jesus (or others) were to evaluate Southland, would he describe us as humble + lowly, always willing to serve?**

We have received the HIGHEST call, church. It's not the easiest, but in God's Kingdom, being a servant is the highest call one can receive! Its upside-down!! But we are called to the **same position as JESUS!**

Consider **Matthew 20:25-28** (in context), *"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **Not so with you.** Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, **but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**"*

- 'Humble Servant' was not just an apt description of Jesus. Jesus expected it would become a description of His disciples and, by extension, of His church! Its in the DNA. Its at the bedrock.

Note: Whenever Jesus talks about being a servant, he always links it to laying down one's life. Really, He links it to His death as the ultimate example of servitude, with the implication that we must also lose our lives in order to serve the needs of others.

- **If serving others doesn't cost you something...** then its not really the kind of serving Jesus called us to. If you only serve others when its convenient for you, or comfortable, or complements your giftings, personality, passions, desires, or interests, then its not really the kind of serving Jesus called us to.

B | The Early Church On Servanthood:

The call to be a servant stayed with the disciples after Jesus' ascension to Heaven. This core value captivated the hearts and minds of the early church. Paul in particular wrote about it often...

Philippians 2:1-8, *"Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being **like-minded**, having the same love, being **one in spirit and of one mind**. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. **Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.** (Be The Church!) **In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:***

*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, **he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.** And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— **even death on a cross!**"*

What does it mean to BE THE CHURCH? That right there. We take on the same mindset, the thinking of Jesus. Here's the fundamental truth: instead of asking, "What can I *get out of* church?" we should ask – "What can I contribute to the Church?" Instead of asking, "Why should I go – what will it benefit me?" rather, we should relish the opportunity to BE THE CHURCH, serving the needs of others!

- **BE THE CHURCH, not "Me. The Church."** *We have an obligation to one another.* Brothers & sisters, we are not our own – **we belong first to Christ, and second, to one another!** (Rom. 12:5)
- **Ex: Wedding Vows + Marriage... Caveat:** I'm not comparing the commitment/exclusivity of a husband/wife to being a member of a church. Whereas marriage is a lifelong commitment, God may prompt you to leave a particular local church to go elsewhere... but Church (as in life *in community* with other believers) isn't optional. **It's a command!**
 - o **Think about wedding vows:** what makes Christian wedding vows unique? For one, it has to do with the *kinds of promises* one makes to their spouse (*exclusivity, chastity,*

- Holiness, permanence, etc)* ... but beyond that, there's a subtle yet profound undertone to Christian vows. I believe that as a Christian spouse, we commit not only to fulfilling *our vows* to the best of our ability, but also to helping our spouse fulfill their vows to us! We do this by praying for them, as well as serving and forgiving them as Christ did for us!
- **In other words, couples have an obligation towards one another, to support and spur each other on to being the best that they can be!** It would not be Christ-like to sit back with arms crossed and say to your spouse, "I will hold up my end of the bargain only if you hold up yours!"
 - o First of all, marriage isn't a bargain or a business deal. It's a RELATIONSHIP! And relationships are a two-way street!
 - o Secondly, Biblical marriage is established under the premise of MUTUAL SUBMISSION – both Husband and Wife submitted to God, meaning they first belong to Christ, and second, to one another! So under Christ, they are both equal and called to serve!
 - o **So too, we the church get to BE THE CHURCH, by serving one another!**
 - **In other words: servanthood goes BOTH WAYS!** *"Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."*
 - o **To serve, but also to BE SERVED... which admittedly is hard for some people.** To allow yourself to be served is to admit that you need help, and to receive care and support.

C | Think About Yourself Less

- *"Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."* Philippians 2:3-4
- *"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you... Honor one another above yourselves."* Romans 12:3, 10 (NIV)
 - o *"Outdo one another in showing honor."* Romans 12:10 (ESV)

Who has heard the following quote before? Follow up question: who attributed it to C.S. Lewis?

- *"Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less. Humility is thinking more of others. Humble people are so focused on serving others, they don't think of themselves."* Rick Warren (Purpose Driven Life)
 - o **This quote is in fact NOT from Lewis, but rather, its from Rick Warren.** Still, it's a great quote, and C.S. Lewis said something very similar in *Mere Christianity*. [C.S. Lewis on Humility: What He Wrote is More Powerful Than What He Didn't \(aaronarmstrong.co\)](#)

I would like to use this quote as a framework to help us understand what it means to be a servant within the Family (Church) of God. ***Being a servant means putting other peoples needs before our own, which requires thinking about ourselves less!***

- **Remember, to be a servant in God's Family is the HIGHEST CALL!** Its an esteemed position!
- To be a servant does NOT mean thinking less of ourselves (negativity). Rather, it's the simple yet profound mindset shift ***to thinking about yourself less!***

Being a servant requires the willingness to GO where God says to GO, when God says to GO. It is to STAY where God asks you to STAY, to DO what God asks you to DO... it is to obey Him and put HIS WILL before your own & THEIR INTERESTS before your own!

In God's Kingdom, this is an ESTEEMED position!

To be clear! This call is so great... so lofty... so IMPOSSIBLE, that we literally could not do it without His help! We need the Holy Spirit dwelling inside us, propelling us, in order to obey.

- **We don't think like this... but God does!** When we say 'YES' to Jesus, we are filled with the Holy Spirit. As we mature, we learn to yield to Him and obey. And over time, our thinking changes... we adopt a new "MINDSET". His thinking is very different from ours!
 - Only in *His power*, and with *His Gifts*, we can accept the call to be servants, and in this way we can BE THE CHURCH. A church filled with power – a bright light!
 - I think that's what we will talk about next week!

Being a servant means putting other people's needs and interests ahead of your own, which requires thinking about ourselves less! It means following in the footsteps of Jesus.

"Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." **John 12:16-17**

Weekly Challenge:

1. Read John 13:1-17 and Philippians 2:1-11 this week. Meditate on the rich truth of Jesus as the greatest Servant of all time! Ask God to inspire you with His example, and to speak to you about how you can grow as a servant!
2. Ask God for one practical action step you can take in putting someone else's needs before your own! (Remember, we don't need to announce what we are doing. Find joy in secretly serving the Lord and others in this way!).
3. Lastly, leave margin in your schedule on Sunday morning to allow time to be OTHERS-MINDED at Church! Visit with your church family, enjoy a coffee together, or even pray with someone!