



Roanoke, Virginia

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***“Serve
Habits of the Heart”***

Mark 10:42-45

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Our passage this morning comes from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10. Jesus and his disciples are on the road up to Jerusalem, and the disciples are doing what they do best: bickering about who will get to be the most important. And this is how Jesus responds:

⁴² Jesus called his disciples and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ⁴³ But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

I’ll be honest: this is not my favorite thing that Jesus ever said.

For me, and I imagine for many of us, the journey from a self-centered desire to be great to joyful hearted, others-centered living, has been a bit rocky. I’m working on it, as Christians, we’re all working on it, but sometimes it’s still a work in progress.



It's difficult, at times, to even understand why focusing on others could or should be a goal in the first place.

Because things haven't changed all that much since Jesus' day. He says, "Look at the Gentiles, when one of them is great, they lord it over everybody else. They do what they want, when they want. They take their power and run with it."

We all know people like that, people who take advantage of positions of power to manipulate outcomes to benefit only themselves. Perhaps we've even been those people.

You watch people like this grow in power, in fame, in accolades. They win elections, for both parties, they run businesses, they dominate social media, our children see them as role models. They experience luxury and notoriety, and it seems like they get what they want.

But, Jesus says, it is not so among you. Whoever wishes to become great among you must be a servant.

And why? Because the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Service is about developing a relationship with Jesus that leads us to live as he lived, with the same kind of selflessness, the same kind of sacrificial love.

Here at Second, when you walk through our sliding glass doors, you'll see a design on the floor – a cross shaped like a compass that represents our mission statement: Finding direction by following Jesus. I've always found this to be a beautiful but ambitious goal. We're saying that we find the direction for our lives by following in the way of Jesus. It acknowledges that the most important thing about our life together is the purpose that develops through our relationship with God.

For us as humans, relationships have always been the key to our identity and survival. For small children, secure relationships with parents make a huge difference for brain development. As we age, it's our relationships that we use to define ourselves – by our families, our churches, our social groups, our political affiliations.

Studies show that relationships help us learn. There are higher success rates for students who feel safe and valued by their school system, teachers, and communities. Academic achievement isn't just determined by book smarts – also necessary is a relationship.

And this is how our faith works, too. The way we live our lives as Christians is fundamentally shaped by the relationship we have with God. We're called to be servants, to love and care for the people around us, not because that's the rule, not because it will get us into heaven, we're called to be servants because that's what Jesus did, and we're doing our best to be like him.

It's funny, most often when you ask people the question, "Why do you serve?" their answers often start in the same place: Because it seemed like the right thing to do.



But talk to them for just a few minutes longer, and they'll start telling you stories. Stories about the people they met, stories about the way these new relationships shaped and challenged them, stories about unlikely friendships, stories that induce compassion. Our relationship with Jesus calls us to service, and the fruit of service is love.

As you've heard, our youth spent several weeks out of the summer on mission trips, experiencing firsthand what happens when you make the choice to serve. Our first trip was to Harlan County, Kentucky, where we worked with Appalachia Service Project to do minor home repair for families in need. Half of our group put siding on a home while the other half worked to build a back porch for a family with five-year-old twins, because they needed to have a safe, second exit for their home. The family couldn't afford to do the repairs themselves because their daughter, Darcy, had recently finished chemotherapy for brain cancer. Between medical bills and the gas money to take her to the hospital, the family was struggling financially.

Sometimes kids are shy when they meet strangers, but not Darcy. From day one, she was out in the backyard with us, directing the construction process. She called us "her girls" and she held our tools, helped carry wood, ate lunch with us (mostly she ate the insides out of our Oreos), introduced us to her baby puppies, and cheered us on even when we thought we would never ever stop digging post holes. Ask anybody in that group, and they would tell you: by the end of the week, we weren't building a porch because we were supposed to, we weren't even building a porch because it was a nice thing to do. We were building a porch for Darcy.

A few weeks after we left, we learned that Darcy's cancer had returned, with a vengeance. Her funeral took place last Saturday, while our second mission team was traveling back from the Dominican Republic.

I'm not one to romanticize mission trips. I know that in all likelihood, we never would have seen Darcy again, but I believe that our relationship with her changed us. It changed our perspective on the world. It challenged us to ask new questions and to abandon some of our assumptions and presuppositions. Our relationship with Darcy expanded our hearts, and it's certainly what is giving me energy and enthusiasm as I think about planning another mission trip back to Kentucky next summer. It's her story that I'll tell when I want other youth or adults to understand why service trips like these matter. We give ourselves in service of others, because Jesus loves them, because Jesus gave his life for them, because Jesus calls us to love them, too. And what a gift we receive when we open our hearts to that kind of love.

When I look around our church, I see that kind of love all over the place.

I see individuals who go out of their way to care for elderly neighbors, church members, or friends.

I see people serving on the boards of local nonprofit organizations because they were transformed by the relationships they made while simply volunteering.



I see fifty youth and almost as many adults in this church building all week, working like crazy to pull off a meaningful VBS program because they love the hundred plus kids who participated.

I see funeral receptions overflowing with food provided by Second Family.

I see church members who volunteer or are in relationship with the leaders of every local ministry we financially support.

I see teenagers giving up a week of their summer to serve new friends in Kentucky and the Dominican Republic.

I see adults giving up a week of their summer, or every Sunday evening during the school year, because they know how important it is to build relationships with our young people.

Every week I see people in this church who come sit at the front desk to answer phones, restock children's worship bags, stuff bulletins and welcome visitors. And they come not just because we need help (and we do), they come because they love the people of this church.

Several weeks a year our church hosts Family Promise in the Alpha Omega house across the street, which means that there are families in our city who would be homeless without the work that dedicated volunteers from this church and many others are doing. They bring meals and spend the night and ensure that these families can stay together.

This church is full of servant hearts.

And ask any one of them. Perhaps their service began in obligation. But the fruit of service is love. Relationship with one another, love for one another, is at the heart of the gospel. It's at the heart of our calling. In serving one another, in serving our neighbors, or even our enemies, it's the relationships we build that transform us, transform the world.

You might think that I would conclude a sermon on service by challenging you to consider where God is calling you to serve. You might think I would give you a list of options, places where you can get plugged in and connected to the work of service that is already going on in our church and our community. And we can do that. If you're noticing that feeling in the pit of your stomach, that gentle nudge towards action, start paying attention. Let's talk about it. Let's figure out where your gifts and talents and passions lie, and be prepared to be transformed by the gift of love that you will receive in return.

But that's not the place to start. Today I want to challenge you to consider your relationship with Jesus. Consider how you are finding direction in your life. Consider how your connection to God makes a difference in your relationships, in your decision-making, in your habits and behaviors. Consider Jesus who, even though he was God, didn't take his power and run with it, he didn't lord it over everyone else. Instead he humbled himself, he became a servant, even though it cost him his life. And he did it all out of love for this world. He did it all out of love for you. The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve. Go and do likewise.

