

Serve-Us vs. Service
Matthew 25:31-46
August 8/9, 2009
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There's one gas station left in my hometown that is a full-service gas station. You know, you pull in ... DING DING ... and the attendant – with the greased-stained hands and tire gauge sticking out of his pocket – comes out of the station and you say, “fill ‘er up.” And as your car is filling up, your windows are washed and your tires are checked and the attendant leans into your open car window and says, “you want me to check your oil?” and if you say no, and he's done with his around-the-car chores, he leans on the car and strikes up conversation. Then you hear the gas pump click – your car is full – and he comes back to the window and says, “that'll be \$23, ma'am.” You pay him – and he promptly produces change and a smile. Now, that's service. Thank goodness there's a full-service gas station in my hometown, or else my mother wouldn't be able to drive her car because the fuel gauge would always be on E for empty. She's an intelligent woman ... she just doesn't know how to pump gas. And she has no interest in learning how. She appreciates full-service.

For many of us, we grew up with the understanding that the church is a full-service station. Church was the place we went to be served. If we were honest, we would admit that that mindset can still continue today. I admit it, I've told people – probably hundreds of people – you should come to my church because we've got a great music program ... you should hear our music groups ... they're really good. You should come and visit our

Christian ed program ... mid-week and weekend, for children and youth ... cuz it's all good. And in worship, we take prayer very seriously and we have good messages and we love baptisms and we love communion. And we love it when we can highlight the stories of the faithful when we're in worship. ... So I'm telling this all to a man who moved into the neighborhood. He was asking me about my church. I told him all about our church, and he said, "Oh, that's great, but what do people do when they leave?" Uhh? He asked again, "What do people do when they leave worship?" My first response: "I don't know." To which he replied: "It's your job to know ... are people leaving to serve or are they just coming to your church to be served?"

Ouch... I failed to mention our service ministry, because I so wanted him to know how the church could serve him. I failed to mention all of those who serve at the food pantry, at the Red Barn, at Summer Stretch, on sr high mission trips, on mission trips for Katrina relief, mission trips to Cuba and Haiti. I failed to mention those who tutor in the public schools, those who read to nursing home residents, those who ring Salvation Army bells, those who stuff the bulletins, those who serve veterans with love & compassion, those who organize blood drives, those who sponsor people with addiction, those who organize Garage Sales, those who pound nails at Habitat building sites, those who cut apart Campbell's soup labels, those who very quietly and with a servant heart take all our donations of food to the food pantry, those who hold babies in hospitals, those who plant flowers, those who knit caps and mittens for local elementary schools, those involved in prayer ministry, those who stuff backpacks for school children, those who collect and calculate our Sentry receipts, those who walk around the track at Relay

for Life, those who live with servant hearts. I failed to mention our servant ministry to my neighbor because I so wanted him to know how the church could serve him. He never came to church here.

We are working through a sermon series called *Living Life with Mission*. Last week, Scott started us off with the invitation to intentionally live with mission, explaining that we have all received a blessing and because of that, we need to offer ourselves in ministry to God.

Please hear these words from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, according to Matthew, as we reflect on service, mission and ministry. (Matthew 25:31-46)

We just ended Vacation Bible School. You've heard from Sarah that it was very successful. *Studio GO Game Show* is a service-based curriculum that encourages kids to take part in service and to take joy in the service they provide because they understand themselves as God's children ... and they begin to understand that service is an expression of who they are. The theme of GO! – go lead, go tell, go obey, go risk, go serve – proclaims a ministry of mission and a ministry of goodness. Thank you for being a faithful, supportive church community for our VBS ministry.

19 sr high youth and 6 adults returned home last week from the sr high mission trip. We served in Benton Harbor, MI, a community in decline. Inner-city struggles are a part of the community's make-up. The education system is greatly challenged. According to public school test results, Benton Harbor School District is nationally ranked at a 2 out of 10 ... 10 being the

highest. Detroit is now ranked at a 3; it used to be the lowest ranked school system in all of MI ... now Benton Harbor has that stigma. Just to give you a broader picture of school ranking: Sun Prairie comes in at 8 out of 10.

Today, with few job opportunities available, nearly 40% of families in Benton Harbor live in poverty, including over half of the town's children. This is a stark contrast to its sister city across the river, St. Joseph, where less than 5% of families live in poverty. Demographically, Benton Harbor, with a population of 11,000 is 95% African American; St. Joe's is 95% white. The town has issues and even though there are efforts to revitalize the community, it's slow progress.

We got to work hand-in-hand with many who are trying to change Benton Harbor. Our role as missionaries was to offer encouragement, service, and God's love. We worked with all ages from children to the elderly. We worked on homes, children's ministry and building relationships. And it was a wonderful experience. We were lifted and encouraged by the YouthWorks staff; YouthWorks being the organization that provides these mission opportunities for youth and adult leaders. I have said these words before ... many times, but please hear them as I say them loud & clear again: Our kids are amazing. The sr high youth that traveled to Benton Harbor served with open hands and open hearts. They were great role models in service and in ministry for me ... and I imagine for the other adults, as well. Our kids proclaimed a ministry of mission and a ministry of goodness.

POWER POINT – We have some photos to share with you of the mission trip. Thanks to the gifts and services of Megan Patterson and Michael Hillestad, we are all able to see the photos on the big screen.

Thank you for being a faithful, supportive church community for our youth and adults interested in mission work.

I don't know about you, but I'm challenged by the parable we heard today. This is one of the few places in the NT where Jesus is the judge. I know we are blessed with many a servant heart in the life of this church – thanks be to God – but we still have some work to do. Too many times instead of Jesus holding us accountable, we try to hold Jesus accountable. Instead of finding how to serve others, we expect Jesus to serve us.

We learn that we are judged not by our membership in a church but rather what we do for others, not by what we know but by what we have shared.

So I guess the work continues and we continue on our journey.

Here at the SPUMC, we present a service-based Vacation Bible School to children to teach them that service and mission is very important. This is the song my 7 yr old has been singing all week:

You don't have to be strong
You don't have to have money
You don't have to be smart
You don't have to be funny
You don't have to be the biggest
You don't have to be the best
You just have to be willing
You just have to say yes.

Because we belong to God, we say YES to serving others.

We take kids on mission trips so they can learn that it's not about recognition, it's not about awards, it's not about being a hero ... it's not even about being a saint. It's about living out the greatest commandment: love others as well as you love yourself. It's about service to others. And it's about an expression of who we are as God's people, who we are as disciples of Jesus Christ. It is simply an expression of our love.

Last week, Scott invited you to take a chance and be involved in some type of mission ministry during this month. I'm going to ask you to take a **risk**. What will you be willing to do to offer yourself in ministry to God over this next month? I pray that God will make us servants today.

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Make me a servant, humble and meek,
Lord, let me lift up those who are weak.
And may the prayer of my heart always be:
Make me a servant, make me a servant, make me a servant today.