

Secure Enough to Serve?

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 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 13:3-5).

A professional mediator once told his class that many workplace disputes escalate into lawsuits simply because the plaintiff felt dishonored or their point of view ignored – *i.e.* they'd been "dissed". Showing sincere regard for a person, giving them a chance to express their grievances, and hearing their story, often defuses explosive workplace relations. According to him, respect for the aggrieved parties is at the heart of resolving conflict.

Since we are made in the image of God, most of us have an innate sense of honor, however distorted by our fallen nature. We are offended, perhaps even righteously indignant, in the face of disrespectful behavior toward ourselves or others. The flip side of this – and the unhealthy side --is that we are very concerned about how others perceive us. Teenagers want to be perceived as cool by their peers. Adults want to be well thought of, or respected. In fact, one study of workplace attitudes stated that visible recognition for one's contribution to the company was a critically important reward for many workers.

It is true now, as it was in Jesus' day, that menial tasks are not particularly attractive to most of us. This is not because they are difficult, but because they don't confer any special honor or status. No one really remembers who set the table or washed the dishes at a meal. Usually we only remember if the food was good or not. This makes Jesus' actions in the above passage striking indeed. He had nothing to gain from serving his disciples in this menial way. And yet, through his example and his teaching, he shows that the most dignified position a disciple can hold is that of a servant.

It is significant that Jesus understood that "the Father had put all things under his power." He knew who he was and was secure in that. He was confident of his own dignity. Menial service did not diminish his self-esteem. In fact it was Jesus' sense of dignity that made it easy, even natural, to take up the servant's towel. Today, many people, influenced by fear of feeding gender or ethnic stereotypes, or having a need to project an image of importance, refuse to be seen in a servant's role. This is really a shame. While we do not seek to force others to serve us, and we do not allow ourselves to be enslaved – we lose immeasurably when we refuse to serve others because of our own insecurities. This is, in fact, a sign of weakness rather than strength.

Another sign of insecurity is the inability to receive service from others. Do you find it difficult to just sit back and let someone serve you? (Don't take this too far!) Does it make you jumpy, like I just can't receive this? Maybe this is the same problem with a different face – pride. It's interesting that further on in this passage, Peter refuses Jesus'

service...possibly out of insecurity or embarrassment for his Master. In a strange way, pride and insecurity are related. Pride says I am better than others. Insecurity says I need to look better than I am. How refreshing when we meet someone who is just comfortable with who they are. I think Jesus was this way. We can overcome the infirmities of pride and insecurity in our lives by imitating Jesus' joyful and willing acts of service.

Then there is the issue of the counterfeit of service – slavery. Author Gary Chapman in his book, *Five Signs of a Functional Family* says “Slavery is at the heart of dysfunctional families. When people serve others because they are forced to do so, freedom to truly serve is lost. Slavery creates anger, bitterness, and resentment. An attitude of service renders service that is freely given, not out of fear but out of choice. It comes out of the personal discovery that ‘it is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ... In the early stages of development, acts of service must be required. But the goal is that the child will quickly find personal satisfaction in serving others.”

There is a security and satisfaction that comes in serving others in an unsung way. By imitating Christ we experience his joy and sense of security as we serve others. Actually, we become great. “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (Matthew 20:26).

A church community like this one offers many opportunities to serve others, often in the most unseen ways. Some have a spiritual gift of service, it is your primary motivation. Regardless if service is your primary gift, we are all called to serve. Keep your eyes open for opportunities to serve someone else's interests and not just your own. You will be amazed at the joy that it will bring you.

Church Calendar

September

- 6 Men's Prayer Breakfast
- 7 Unity Service, Augusta Expo, 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.
- 9 Tuesday Evening Praise Service
- 10 Alpha Begins
- 14 7th anniversary picnic after church, details TBA
- 17 Dunamis begins
- 21 Gideon Presentation during morning service
- 24 Wednesday Evening Classes

October

- 1,8,15,22,28 Wednesday Evening Classes
- 14 Tuesday Evening Praise Service
- 24-5 Grace Covenant Roanoke Women's Retreat

November

- 5,12,19 Wednesday Evening Classes
- 11 Tuesday Evening Praise Service
- 13-15 Grace Network Leaders Retreat, Bethlehem, PA
- 27 Thanksgiving Day