

If You Only Knew

Wayne Waibel – 10/17/2021

Once again, the problem the disciples are having is their desire for glory. Once again, they are so caught up in that quest that they fail to see the ramifications of that desire. Even after Jesus expressly illuminates the consequences.

James and John are very frontal with their expectations allowing the other ten to witness their gigantic misstep. And instead of cautionary understanding – they too succumb to the quest for glory and become indignant with James and John - exposing their own shallowness.

It must be getting off the charts heart breaking for Jesus to be continually reminded how poorly the twelve listen. They are fast approaching hall of fame status when it comes to “having ears they could not hear.”

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And still, Christ is relentless. “I have not come to be served, but to serve.” He says it over and over. He lives it all day every day. His ministry – His mission is but to serve. It is the prime example of a life of grace for all to emulate.

You don't get to the glory part without the service part. No shortcuts here. You wouldn't really want the synthesized version anyway. It has no substance – no quality – no resonance. It would be an empty result.

This is why Jesus keeps going back to the innocence of a child. To get in front of this service or ministry dynamic, you have to envision how it plays out with the most vulnerable – that would, at least in the time of Jesus, be a child.

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A colleague of mine is diligent in his efforts to fully recover from his addiction. He talks about "living amends." His explanation was inspired. My understanding of the term is not only sincere remorse for wrongs committed while under the influence, but demonstrating through action the extent of your commitment to atone.

In other words – not talking about how sorry you are, but supporting the attitude through how you now live your life. Show people you're sorry – don't tell them.

I think that kind of dedication is what Jesus calls us to in inviting us to be of service. That act of servitude is not only Christ-like – it is self-affirming. It's our own personal little "attaboy" not for its own sake, but for the greater good.

All too often these days – the act of service is interpreted as a weakness or at the very least – ill advised. But to serve is the dividing line between a life well spent and a life lost. Following Jesus in a life of servanthood transforms us unto eternal life.

The good news is that we have the capacity to comprehend how Jesus understood His ministry – “He came to give His life as a ransom for many.” There it is

It’s as profound as a certainty and holds our lives in the balance from everlasting to everlasting. When we follow Jesus – we acknowledge His supreme sacrifice – aspire to a life of servitude, as is His desire for us, and rejoice in the abundant life that servitude provides.

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One of the most remarkable aspects to the awkwardness of the twelve is that their ineptitude lasts as long as it does. They’re just average Joes trying their best. And Jesus is very tolerant of them, as we need to be, because they are us. In possession of the same frailties and shortcomings, certainly – but also capable of great courage and a depth of understanding that evaporates the weak-minded shallowness of a shortsighted worldview.

In our attempts to embrace the “but to serve” philosophy we discover not only the rightness of a Christ-centered life, but we exemplify for others what that can look like. A greater gift to our fellow man would be hard to find. We end up not only personifying a righteous life, we help ourselves as well, but only if our motivation is pure. Servitude is its own reward.

If you only knew that we do not choose to serve God – God chooses us, and will not let us go. If you only knew that those servants who are set apart by ordination are set aside for function – not status.

Jesus is a masterful worker of men. Nowhere is that more evident than with the patience He demonstrates towards James and John. As a result of that long-suffering commitment to His disciples, we in turn reap the benefit.

The disciples ultimately transform into the very vessels Jesus envisioned when He made His initial choice; proving yet again that with God, all things are possible. Images of wonder abound lifting us from our accustomed ways and amazing us that there is anything here and not nothing at all.

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But to serve seems like such a forgone conclusion. Of course we are here to serve one another. Over the eons of time that service has come to mean many things, but the qualities of a servant’s life – remain steadfast.

I mentioned earlier that to serve is its own reward. While I hold that to be truth – it goes even beyond that. The reality of God is always so much more than our capacity to comprehend. God is God, and we are not. It is after all, *His* world – not ours.

All the little niceties you employ throughout a day are active expressions of service. I submit that each of you spends most of your waking hours tending to or praying for someone else's need. If you only knew how vital that practice is to the well-being of all mankind.

One of the things that impresses me most about this community of faith is the almost automatic way you folks have of ministering unto others. It has been evident from the outset that my presence here is made manifest in the nature of your being. You folks are supremely skilled at taking care of one another. My role is to keep from interfering with that dynamic.

I don't think you know any other way to be. And you don't limit that way to just present company. You spread that generous servant's mentality beyond our doors and extend your hand to all. And you do it often.

Whenever I'm asked, "How are things in Belle Plaine?" It's such a joy to go into the routine workings of the church community, and people really do delight in our little adventures down here in the river valley.

The thing that I always end my report with, and it fills me with such a wonderful feeling because of the weight this carries – is that these people really know how to take care of one another. And that my friends is possible only because each of you fully embrace the Lord's own mission – not to be served, but to serve.

It's as if you already knew that the promise of the gospel is that in the sacrifice of self for others, not only will a higher and better self emerge, but the reign of God will continue to unfold – on earth, as it is in heaven. Amen.