

First Presbyterian Church  
Bozeman, Montana  
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November 15, 2009  
*Discipleship Series*  
Luke 10:29-37 & Ephesians 4:7, 11-16

### **To Live and to Serve**

We are nearing the end of our 12-week series on the marks of Christian discipleship. Twelve weeks! I've learned in the time I've been in ministry here not to expect very many people to be continuously in worship for 12 weeks—people travel on vacations, they get sick, they have business that takes them out of town—so our strategy has been to hit each of the 6 marks twice, in scrambled order, in hopes that most people would hear something about each one of the six sometime this fall. (By the way, if you miss a week, our sermons are always posted on the church's website later in the week, and stay there in the archives. It's not quite the same as the live sharing of the Word, but it's there.) Next week we will conclude this series, and we think it's fitting to ask for a response, so we will have a Commitment Service within our worship, and give you each a take-home card to help you remember the commitment you are making when you say you are a disciple of Jesus Christ. Pray daily, worship weekly, read the Bible regularly, be in service within and outside the church, be in relationships to encourage spiritual growth, and give of time, talents and resources. These are the basic marks of Christian discipleship toward which we are striving and by which faith is lived and strengthened. They are not super-hero Christian practices—they are habits which every one of us can incorporate into our lives.

And be glad when we do. I promise you that—the rewards are great.

It was the ultimate reward, the reward of eternal life that a lawyer was seeking one fine day in first century Palestine. "Rabbi," he said to Jesus, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He knew the scriptures, the teachings of his tradition. Was he testing Jesus, to see if Jesus knew them as well as he did? Was he trying to entrap Jesus somehow?

If that was the case, it didn't work. Jesus answered his question with another question. "What does it say in the Good Book? How do you interpret it?" and of course the lawyer knew the Law. "To love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." I think the lawyer really did understand that loving God in every sphere of our being, this summation of the first four of the ten commandments, was key—I'm sure he prayed daily, worshiped weekly, and read the Bible every chance he got. But he was stuck on the summation of the second half of the law, the part about loving neighbors as ourselves. Yes, he undoubtedly knew commandments 5 through 10, and 608 others. But where should he draw the line? Who is my neighbor? And how far should I go on his behalf?

So Jesus tells this story, one which has played in the minds and hearts of millions of people across generations and cultures. The story of the Samaritan who was good, who even today exemplifies what neighborly love looks like. "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho," says Jesus, but this man is not the remarkable one in the story. A priest passes by—he is not memorable, either. A Levite, the same. It is the Samaritan whom we all remember, because the Samaritan is a person of action motivated by compassion. Wow, look at this guy. Jesus draws us a picture of love for neighbors.

Now there's nothing exceptional about any one thing he does. He's not a miracle worker, he's an ordinary sort of hero. But listen to all the action words for which the

Samaritan is the subject: he came near, he saw, he was moved, he went, he bandaged, he poured, he put, he brought, he took care, and then he took out of his wallet. This was a man of action. His love and service went far beyond talk. So what motivated him? The only indication within the story is that it says he was “moved with pity.” He saw a need, he saw a fellow human being, he ignored the boundaries of ethnic and religious differences and crossed over to respond. The lawyer understood the Samaritan’s motivation. He called him, “the one who showed mercy.”

And if that lawyer really was wondering how to define a neighbor, where to draw the line, and how to be the kind of neighbor the scriptures command, he only needed to look to the Samaritan to know the answers. A neighbor is anyone in need. There is no line which says that some human beings are neighbors and others are not. Showing mercy, stepping up when a need is apparent, giving what is needed without regard to the cost—this is the way that God wants us to love others as we love ourselves. This is the way, the path, the secret that is no secret, to eternal life.

Because it is the way of Jesus. “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve,” said our Lord. He was talking about himself, and setting the pattern for his disciples. Compassion in action marks the Christian life.

So we serve, both within the church and outside of it. Our service within the church is so that the church can live out its calling as the body of Christ. The story is told of the statue of Jesus in an English village which was bombed in World War II. Before being bombed, the statue conveyed Jesus’ invitation to “Come to me,” his outstretched arms reaching to those who are weary and heavily burdened. Following the war, the people of the village chose not to repair the hands which were broken off this statue, but instead to add an inscription below, “Christ has no hands but ours.” The thought comes from the insight of 16<sup>th</sup> century mystic, Teresa of Avila, who wrote:

Christ has no body but yours,  
 No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
 Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
 Compassion on this world,  
 Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
 Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.  
 Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
 Yours are the eyes, you are his body.  
 Christ has no body now but yours,  
 No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
 Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
 compassion on this world.  
 Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Our call is to serve in the manner of our Lord, to be his body. But the “you” in this writing is not a collection of individual “yous.” Rather, it is the collective “you,” the plural “you,” the gathered bodies who form one body, one spiritual body, the church. Together we are the body of Christ, animated by the Holy Spirit. Together we serve; together we live as the body of Christ.

I'd like to draw another picture of Christian service, Christian neighborliness in action. Last summer a group of 22 from this church traveled to Skagway, Alaska, to partner in mission with another church called First Presbyterian Church, where Ryan Mandeville is the pastor. Imagine a 100-year-old frame church building, just a couple of blocks from Skagway's main street and shopping district. It's always been painted white, but the ravages of weather require frequent re-painting. And when we arrived in late June, it looked pretty bad. The worn and chipped paint could be seen from across the street. It looked tired and old, like nobody loves this church.

But they do, and they invited us to love it, too. The equipment was ready, it just needed willing hands. So we scraped and smoothed, taped and prepped. Some of us were on the ground, some on ladders, some holding ladders, some on scaffolds. The first coat of primer improved the appearance of the building tremendously—but don't look too closely. It was just primer.

There was still a lot to do in a short time. The entire building needed a second coat. So again, paintbrushes in hands, some stood on the ground, some on ladders of various sizes, some climbed onto scaffolding, and some even ascended to the tower on a cherry-picker. An overseeing eye kept the paint buckets filled, gave direction to teenagers who finished their section, and ensured that everyone was working safely. When it was time to quit for the day, all those brushes needed cleaning, and all those bodies needed to be fed. The people of the church did their part—the food arrived in massive quantities, along with church members of various ages and stages. The last 5-gallon can of paint was ordered from Juneau, and flown to Skagway overnight so that we could finish on time.

And at the end of that short week, the job was 95% finished. Only a few very hard-to-reach spots were still to be painted—the rest of the building sparkled. The workers were proud, the church members were pleased as could be, and the townspeople were grateful for the beauty restored to the historic building.

One of the reasons I love mission trips, and this is why I'm telling this story, is that they make visible the body of Christ in action, in service. Team members use their gifts, and discover abilities they didn't know they had. Can you picture the team and their paintbrushes covering virtually the entire building? It makes real the concept that **WE ALL HAVE A PART TO PLAY**. We all are important and needed in the body. If there are slackers, the rest have to make up the difference. But if we all work together, we can accomplish far more than we could ever dream of doing individually. One person might try to paint the entire church in a whole summer, but 22 people working together got it done in about 16 hours. As the writer of Ephesians describes us, "the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love." (Eph 4:16)

My friends, as disciples of Christ we are together his body, and what Christ does is serve. Love your neighbor as yourself is our mandate, and Christian service means seeing a need and acting. I have one more picture of Christian service to draw for you today, and that is the network of Christian service that happens in this congregation. Perhaps you've heard of the 20-80 rule—that 20% of the people do 80% of the work? I don't know the origin of that rule, but I believe this church breaks it. Yes, we have some people who do amazing amounts of service within our church and in the community, more than what some might

consider their “share.” But in a highly unscientific study, I went through the church directory and counted the people who I know are actively giving their time and talents to the ministries and mission of this congregation. I easily came up with 200 names from the 500 or so people affiliated with us. That’s 40%, and when you consider that we have a large number of elderly and homebound persons whose abilities to serve are somewhat limited, that’s a pretty good percentage. It defies the 20-80 rule. Perhaps you are skeptical, maybe if you’ve been the person trying to recruit help for a project and have had people turn you down. That happens here, as in any church. But there are many ministries in this congregation which are unsung, behind the scenes, supportive ministries which go on largely unnoticed but which quietly touch the lives of many. I believe we have a healthy Christian community which understands well that the call to follow Christ is a call to service.

Do you hear the call? Are you in this picture? Is Christ alive in you as you live and serve neighbors?

He has no hands but ours..

Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”