

“Will We Ever Learn?”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney ~ September 8, 2024

James 2:1-10, 14-17 Mark 8:27-37

How many of you remember the old full-service gas stations? My grandparents owned a county store in North Carolina. We spent hours there as kids. We'd pick up around the place and they would reward us with pop and candy. I remember drivers pulling up for gas and someone going out to greet them.

Many of us can remember men wearing their navy-blue pants and blue pin stripe shirts. Each one had a pocket protector with pens and a tire gauge protruding from it. When someone pulled up, we'd hear the familiar “ding ding” and watch the crew go to work. They would check the oil, and the air in the tires. They washed the windows and pumped the gas. We never had to leave the car in rain or shine. Those kinds of stations are mostly a memory these days.

There was a time, for many of us, when church was a place, we went to be served. We went to hear an inspiring message. We looked forward to our favorite hymns, to listen to a well-trained choir, to have the pastor pray over us, to have our children taught and our faith encouraged and then, having been “well served” we went home. That's how I remember it anyway. Little has changed in this regard. I know when I meet a new family, they will probably make a circuit of the area churches. I know that we are being evaluated in terms of what services we offer to their household.

Years ago, I had many people tell me straight out that they wouldn't be coming back because we didn't have a “traditional” youth group; or enough stained-glass windows; or a large enough men's group... and so off they went with their list. There are enough churches around us so that eventually people can find what they're looking for.

But, you know, somewhere in the journey of faith, a transition must happen. I do not know exactly when it happened for me. You might not be able to point to a date or an event when it happened for you. But somewhere, somehow as Christians we need to find ourselves moving away from “serve us” to “service.” Where the church is no longer a place we go “to be served” but “to serve.” You know what I mean? James writes in 2:14, “What's the use of saying you have faith if you don't prove it by your actions?” And in 2:17, “Faith that doesn't show itself by good deeds is no faith at all – it is dead and useless.”

The Lord intends for us to be a full-service station equipped and committed to serving the needs of our community. What a beautiful metaphor for us! A full-service station for Lake County and beyond! Right now, God is looking for churches like that. The Bible says in 2 Chronicles 16:9, “The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.” Does God’s eyes land on us? Does he find us fully committed to him.

Paul tells us in Philippians, that our minds must be on what is right. We must strive to do what is best for our families, our church, and our community. It is only by striving to do what is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, then we do the will of God. For what we think about, we can make happen.

According to God’s word we will be judged less on what we said or what we did in this life and more on what we failed to do when we had the opportunity to serve others! This is a lesson we all need to learn and remember. It is a tough lesson, but a very important one because our whole understanding of every piece of scripture rests upon service and not serve us.

So where does this leave us? It must move us to see ministry in a new light. It cannot be “serve us,” but rather how we “serve others.” It means that the days of letting someone else pay for the service of church must change. Service should cost each of us something when we step out in faith. The church should always be seen through the eyes of worship and service. It means that we begin to look at church and see it for what it really is, that this is our church and if it succeeds or fails, it is up to each of us.

This is also why today is so important. What is today? Rally Day! On one level we think of it as Sunday School and Bible Study starting back up. But that is just too small of a view. It should be telling all of us that summer is over and it’s time to get back to work. Advent is around the corner and there is much to do around here. We must make God’s home a place where we can invite. It is a place of ministry and mission outreach. It is a time to bring our worship out of the pews back into the community. Rally Day is a day to move. So, if you are not involved in a ministry, it’s time. If you are not connected with education, it’s time. If you are not serving God, it’s time. Church will always be about service.

A young couple from the hills of Arkansas got involved in a church where they were used to a lot of shouting and clapping and running down the aisles for

Jesus. They were trying to convince Grandma that she should attend. “You should have seen,” the young man said, “the spirit of God was really there! The music was rocking that place. It was awesome!” Grandma just kept rocking in her chair and didn’t say a word. “And you should have heard that preacher! He was shouting and screaming at the top of his lungs. The people were popping up like popcorn praising Jesus!” And again, grandma said nothing. Finally, the young man said, “Grandma, don’t you like our church?” Grandma finally rose from her chair and said, “Honey, I don’t care how loud they shout, and I don’t care how high they jump. It’s what they do when they come back down that counts!”

Jesus said it’s not how good we feel when we leave here that counts, it’s how we live out our faith daily and how we respond to the needs of others that’s most important!

God’s vision for us from day one is to become a full-service station where each of us are the attendants working together to serve those in need through dynamic worship, exciting Sunday morning programs for Children, youth groups, women’s ministry, men’s ministry, Bible Study, Home groups, Recovery Groups, Habitat for Humanity, and one and on and on! Can you begin to imagine how our own facility will help us offer even more service to our community?

To effectively resource the full-service station that God has called us to be, requires the commitment and resources of every man, woman, and child of our Christian fellowship. No one can exempt themselves from God’s service. Each one of us must, with God’s help, pray about, discover and then offer to the body of Christ our commitment to serve. We need to know that we can count on you! Amen.