

# **“The Church We Want to Be: Service”**

*The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – September 26, 2021*

*Mark 9:38-50*

I pulled up to a stop light recently and looked at a sign by the road. It was a sign for a restaurant that said, “Of course we are looking for help, aren’t we all?” It seems like everywhere you go, there is a “help wanted” sign in the window. I can honestly admit that there has never been a time when I have seen so many “help wanted” signs. You can have a pick of any job out there. Want to work in a restaurant? No problem. How about retail? Sure thing. How about manufacturing? Easy peasy! Everyone is needing help. And there are so many reasons why we are in this situation. No one reason, no political talking point, no COVID excuse is filling the jobs nor explaining why they are so prevalent.

So, what do you do when you see those signs? Sigh and keep walking? Do you stop and ponder the fact that so many are in need of help? Or do you just let it flow over you and ignore the problem because it is not your problem. You are retired or you have a job, right? That is someone else’s issues.

Sometimes, in the church, when I ask for help, it feels like I am just being ignored. We need people to step up and be officers or help with *Agape Feast!* dinners, be lectors or greeters, or work with the youth. Let me pose the question again, if it is not affecting you, what do you do when you hear that help is wanted?

For the last two weeks we have been talking about creating the church that you have always longed for. The first week we talked about Worship. We gather and want to have a worship service to makes us feel connected to God. We seek it to be professionally done and it has to have quality. But the funny part is, worship has never been about being

“TV quality.” We leave that to the televangelists as they milk widows out of their pensions. Worship will always be about us recognizing God in our midst and how far away we are from the perfection God wishes for us.

Last week we talked about fellowship. Fellowship is the glue that holds churches together because it connects us with each other. If we had no connection, our time would be lonely and boring. We would all just come in and do our own thing and then leave. We would never get to do mission or ministry. We would never pray for each other. We would never be moved to offer a simple smile to make someone feel welcomed. Fellowship is building friendships and relationships. If worship builds a relationship with God, fellowship builds the relationship with God’s people.

Today, I want to talk about how our worship and our fellowship leads us to the next step. If we have a church that connects us with God and a church that connects us with each other, it is just a small step to have a church that thinks beyond itself. The church challenges us to see a bigger picture of the world. We see that there is no one that for whom Jesus did not die. There is no one that Jesus does not love. And if Jesus loves these other people, then maybe there is room in our hearts to love them as well.

When we think about why a church exists, there are always two options. The first is a church that serves its members. It is built for the members’ comfort and convenience. The sanctuary resembles something you would see on TV more than any sanctuary I know of. The church provides meals for its members. The programming is for its members. The pastor and staff cater to the membership.

The other type of church is one that looks beyond the membership. It sees the world and seeks to serve the world. They try to embrace the challenge to bring the gospel to the world through its words and its actions. They talk the talk, but they also walk the walk.

Matthew 25 challenges us to talk the talk and walk the walk. Jesus tells the people that he has separated them as sheep and goats. And each grouping is because one side did ministry beyond themselves and the other did not. He said, “FOR I WAS HUNGRY AND YOU GAVE ME FOOD, I WAS THIRSTY AND YOU GAVE ME SOMETHING TO DRINK, I WAS A STRANGER AND YOU WELCOMED ME I WAS NAKED AND YOU GAVE ME CLOTHING. I WAS SICK AND YOU TOOK CARE OF ME, I WAS IN PRISON AND YOU VISTED ME.” Then the people were perplexed and asked when that happened and he told them, “WHEN YOU DID IT TO THE LEAST OF THESE WHO ARE MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY, YOU DID IT TO ME.”

And that is the answer to why the church exists isn’t it. We worship God to know God. We fellowship to know each other. We serve because we are called to extend our care beyond ourselves. We exist because there is such a large world and God is everywhere because we are everywhere.

But I am not trying to deceive you about how hard this is. Our world tells us to think about ourselves. It is me, and mine before you and the rest of the world. I am to get my own satisfaction and then with what is left, I may be able to give something to you. This is summed up brilliantly in the statement, “Fascinated by how the behavior of the people who took three pieces of pizza at the pizza party because they thought it would run out and the people who took one piece for the exact same reason is such a perfect encapsulation of the American beliefs about community.”

But you see the question should never be, “Is this action left-wing or right-wing, liberal or conservative, socialist or capitalist. The question

should always be, “Does what I do love my neighbor, look out for their interests more than my own, and manifest the fruit of the Spirit?” If it does not, it is probably not following God’s interest in humanity.

I have always found that in giving, I receive back. I am not talking about giving and God will store treasures for you in heaven. I am talking about joy. To see true gratitude in the faces of others who have nothing to give back to you. That joy is honest, and I appreciate being a part of giving joy to others. How about you? Do you know that joy and the gift you get when you give to the needs of others? Sure, you do. You get that when you participate in our offering, Special Offerings, at Christmas when you take names off the Christmas tree for children. You know that joy in others because it is the same joy you receive when you serve and share and love.

And the joy we receive is not just in giving money to someone or buying presents for small children. It comes when we serve on boards, when we do mission, being on the phone with a shut in, being the person who moves out of his or her pew and sits with a visitor, so they are not alone in a room full of strangers. It is when we strike up conversations with someone we do not know or learning something about the youth of the church. The list can go on and on. It is all service. It is looking beyond you to see who else Jesus loves.

The church is not the church if it does not serve. It is no different than Rotary, the country club, or some knitting group. The church is the church because it reaches beyond itself and opens its heart to love others first. Amen.