

Maundy Thursday
St. John 13:1-17; 31b-35
April 18, 2019
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

To Serve

“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.”

Serve others as I have served you.

We see and experience a servant God, seeking not our service so much as desiring to serve us.

Do unto others what I have done for you.

No service is too humble for you to perform. Set aside your pride and open your heart and care for those who are in need of help and caring. Care about others as I have cared about you.

As I have done for you, go and likewise do for others.

To serve, you must have your eyes open and your ears also. On Wednesday evenings, Lynn and I often go out for dinner to our favorite restaurant. We love the food and the service. Our server is almost always the same, a man named Aitor. He never assumes what we will order. He makes suggestions. He watches carefully and provides for our needs as he notices them in a timely way. He listens carefully to what we want, and remembers our tastes from past visits. The various courses arrive as we are ready for them. His eyes and his ears are fully open to our needs and his goal is to serve us well, and so he does. As good as the food is, so is his careful and kind service to us. He makes me feel at ease with my discomfort of being served when I feel I should be serving.

Service implies caring about others. Serving satisfies our desire to be needed and of value to others. The reward of service is the satisfaction of the one who is served. Sometimes service implies times of lesser or greater sacrifice.

- People “serve” us in Congress. Many of them could have pursued more lucrative careers, but choose instead to serve people they do not even know through

sometimes personal sacrifice of time, energy and income. They get into such service because they care.

- People who “serve us” in the military do so at risk and peril to their own lives in far away and often extremely difficult circumstances. Sometimes they do the ultimate service and sacrifice their life for us. It is appropriate that they say ‘they served in the Service.’
- Factory workers serve us by making good things for us, proudly serving by creating a product we can trust. It is long and hard and often repetitive work. They sacrifice much time, physical and mental energy in order to serve us that we might enjoy what they make of high quality and usefulness and of which they are proud.
- Hospital and Nursing Home workers serve us directly by caring for us or for our elderly friends and relatives. They do so with loving care in sometimes difficult and health risk situations. But they are there for us. They find serving others more satisfactory than serving themselves.
- The motto written on many police cruisers says, “To Protect and To Serve.” Most of what police do is serve others and give their time and best to do so.
- Teachers serve us and our children by preparing them for life. Teachers could make more money doing something else, but choose to sacrifice this over their love of teaching and the students and families they serve. They find serving others more satisfactory than serving themselves.
- The service of sanitation and maintenance workers is vital to the health and functioning of our workplaces, neighborhoods and cities. I can vouch for this when I lived through a sanitation workers strike when I lived in New York City. By the second week the stench was great in the streets and the trash was piled up to the second story of many buildings. Take away a service many of us take for granted, and the whole community falls apart and grinds to a halt.
- Grocery workers, we are reminded recently, serve us faithfully and daily, facilitating our search for the right food, helping us find it, quietly preparing or stocking it, helping us check out our purchases smoothly and by keeping the store spotless and sanitary. They find purpose and meaning in serving others, no matter how humbly or unnoticed. They find that service more satisfactory than serving themselves. In the recent grocery workers strike this past week, these workers have become real and individual people to me, in a way that they stand out from the background of their service where perhaps I never took the time enough to notice them and their service to me. Now I am aware of how grateful I should be.

Service is waiting upon another. Waiting is a good word. Waiting to see what they need. When we wait on another, we have to take ourselves out of the center of our focus and place them before our ears and eyes, and all our senses. Sometimes service means simply being with another in silence. Sometimes our words are

inadequate to help. The highest form of service is being present to another. The ministry of presence is just being there for someone. This is one of the ways God is with us, in a ministry of presence that we can feel, experience and tap into. When I serve someone, I must give of myself, of my heart and my passion if the service is to reach its maximum effect. Just going through the motions loses meaning and purpose in any service. Service must come from the heart.

Our God is a God of service. God serves us rather than expecting us to serve Him. God encourages us to serve others as we have been served. Service frees us from the obligation to merely do things out of a sense of shoulds, The sign on many churches quotes the scripture, "Where Service is Perfect Freedom." It comes from the Anglican Collect for Peace:

O God, you are the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom stands our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom: Defend us, your humble servants, in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in your defense, may not fear the power of any adversaries; through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Service brings Peace. Blessed peace.

If God comes among you and does not expect to be waited upon, but rather, waits upon you, how should you behave, do you suppose? If Jesus humbled himself to wash the feet of his disciples, should we not do the same? Should we at least follow in the spirit of His service?

In Luke 22:26-27 Jesus is quoted as saying:

"...Let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves."

I wonder if we can exchange the word serve for the word love in tonight's Gospel and find the same meaning: "A new commandment I give to you, that you serve one another; even as I have served you, that you also serve one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you serve one another." AMEN