



Servant Leadership:
First We Serve.
That's How We Lead.

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
September 23, 2012 Rev. Larry Moffet

Chris Johnson describes the happiest moving worker he ever met. The young man worked hard while offering smiles and lots of good humor. “Why are you so happy?” he asked. “Moving furniture is hard work.” The reply, “Yeah I get a paycheck for moving furniture. What I really like about my job is helping families deal with a very tough time.”

Is that moving company worker a servant leader? Yes. I don't need to know what his theology is. He gets it.

Today's Gospel Scripture gives us a simple lesson. Don't exclude people because they aren't thinking or acting like you want them to.

***39* John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out evil spirits in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.”**

***39* But Jesus said, “Do not stop him...⁴⁰Whoever is not against us is for us.**

***41* ...whoever gives you a cup of water to drink...will by no means lose the reward.**

God bless John and all the disciples. They told this story on themselves. They wrote it down so we would know that it is easy to exclude people we ought to include. They had to struggle with that. When we do the same thing we can realize they made this mistake and got over it. So will we.

This would never happen at First Church: in a congregation I used to serve one of my favorite sweet elderly women got to her regular pew and said to a first time visitor, “Excuse me but that is where I sit.” Asked why she did that, she said, “Well if they are going to come here they ought to know that is where I want to be.” Translation: they need to follow my directions if they want to be one of us.” A wise, gentle woman in the congregation took had a nice visit with her. Flexibility is a spiritual grace.

When that congregation began to grow, another member said, “I don't know why you spend time with new people. Far as I am concerned we [translation: you] need to take care of the people we already have.”

The point of today's Gospel Scripture is simple: Serve others. Jesus says to John, ***“So you want to be a leader? Give a cup of cool water. Meet people at the point of their need. Get to know the one who is healing in my name, Include them, First we serve.*** As we connect with others and serve them, then we look around and realize “people are following me.”

This is how it works: First we serve. That's how we lead.

Faith, Spirituality, Life itself becomes real when we serve. First we serve.

Serve “where your heart’s gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”

–Frederick Buechner *Wishful Thinking* p. 93

That’s what Jesus says in this teachable moment to his closest friends, and to us today. First we serve.

People misinterpret the next few words all the time. To me it’s clear that right after this tender teaching Jesus launches into humorous hyperbole. He kids the disciples: “If you don’t want to serve, cut whatever part of our life out that is causing you to resist.” Do NOT read these verses literally.

We are not literalists. Aren’t you glad? Jesus is using humor here.

Please don’t cut your hand off if you do something wrong, or pluck you eye out if you feel like you saw something from a wrong “viewpoint.”

Jesus is simply saying: “This idea of serving first is hard. Don’t let your natural self cause you to miss out on the joy of serving first. As for throwing resisting parts of ourselves in Gehenna, note that some Bibles translate Gehenna as “hell.” Gehenna is a long, deep canyon outside Jerusalem. It was the town dump. It was always smoldering. So when you read about a burning pit, see a smoky town dump. Enemy armies had to go through Gehenna to get to Jerusalem.

As for being salted with fire, I have absolutely no clue what Jesus meant. Both salt and fire can preserve food, and also destroy it. Maybe he was saying, “**Be sure you preserve this idea of serving first – salt it. Cook it.** Salt adds flavor, so enjoy it. And be at peace.”

⁴⁹“For everyone will be salted with fire.

⁵⁰Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it?

Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.

The big thing to remember is we like the disciples stumble over the idea that we serve first. Serving first is counter-cultural. Our culture tells us to be effective we must lead first. The first disciples of Jesus had that same idea:

“He won’t follow us. If you lead the right way, people follow.

Jesus says, **“Serve first.”** It’s hard to hear.

Did you see the newspaper yesterday? The idea of serving first is so contrary to our culture that someone at the local paper misheard my sermon title.

We phone something fresh for our little ad on Saturday’s church page. They couldn’t hear **“Serve first. That’s how we Lead.”** So they printed:

“Lead first, that’s how we serve.” My point! That’s what the culture tells us.

There are so many examples, just from today’s activities, about ways people in this congregation serve first. We know how to serve. We might ask How can we best serve?

James tells us: “Serve together. It takes a community to serve well, and to keep on meeting people at the point of their need.”

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? ...sing songs of praise.

¹⁴ Are any among you sick? ...call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil ... ¹⁵The prayer of faith will save the sick,

the Lord will raise them up; ...and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another,

so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

And don't put up barriers between yourselves and other who are serving. Join in with them, too, Jesus would say. Here's an email from earlier in the week:

...About a month ago I sent you an email asking you to pray for my friend who was in the hospital awaiting a heart transplant. I wanted to give you an update. His heart basically stopped working entirely, and he was only being kept alive by machines. They did eventually find a heart for him however as they prepared him for surgery they discovered an infection and couldn't do surgery. That's when something miraculous happened. His heart began to heal itself. The doctors at UNMC said they had never seen anything quite like it. I am happy to say that my friend went home a few days ago. The World Herald interviewed him. That story has spread over the the world. Here is a link to the UK Daily Mail story if you want to read it.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2208123/Michael-Crowe-Man-waiting-heart-transplant-stuns-family-heart-HEALS-itself.html>

I wanted to thank you for your prayers. I know that your prayers and so many others' are the reason he is doing how he is now. Thanks again. Matt Mimick

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Parker Palmer, Habits of the Heart, says we need to serve because:

Serving helps understand we are all in this together.
Serving gives us a sense of otherness.

Serving gives us a sense of personal voice and agency.
Serving creates a capacity to create community.

EPISTLE SCRIPTURE JAMES 5:13-16

Live faith in community.

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful?

They should sing songs of praise.

¹⁴Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.

¹⁵The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up;

and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another,

so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

***THE GOSPEL MARK 9:38-50** John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out evil spirits in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us."
³⁹But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.

⁴⁰Whoever is not against us is for us.

⁴¹For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink

because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

⁴² "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me,

it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung
around your neck
and you were thrown into the sea.

⁴³If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off;
it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two
hands and to go to Gehenna,
to the unquenchable fire.

⁴⁵And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better
for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be
thrown into Gehenna.

⁴⁷And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out;
it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye
than to have two eyes and to be thrown into Gehenna, ⁴

⁸where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

⁴⁹**For everyone will be salted with fire.**

⁵⁰**Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness,
how can you season it?**

**Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one
another.**

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A young servant leader: *Caine's Arcade* is a short YouTube film about a 9 year-old boy. Caine Monroy took cardboard boxes and made a cardboard arcade in his father's small home-owned auto parts store in East L.A. A passerby was intrigued and asked Caine, "How much does it cost to play?" "For \$1 you get 4 turns. For \$2 you get a Fun Pass." "How many games in a Fun Pass?" "You get 500 games." He was Caine's only customer. When the customer won a game Caine hopped inside the box and pushed tickets out through a slot in the box. That customer set up a Facebook page with pictures and story, inviting people to come to the cardboard arcade. Caine's Dad took him for Pizza, and when they came back he saw scores of people chanting "We came to play."