

Being a Servant

Readings: John 13: 12-17 and Luke 10: 25-29

John 13: 12-17

14 And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. 15 I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. "

Luke 10:25-29

25 One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: "Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?"

26 Jesus replied, "What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?"

27 The man answered, "'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"^[c]

28 "Right!" Jesus told him. "Do this and you will live!"

29 The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

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May I pray...

Lord God please may we each hear what your words mean for us today, so we may be encouraged and enabled to join in your plans for us as your gathered church. Amen.

Firstly a little story....

Menachim, a Jewish father was troubled by the way his son, Benyamin, had turned out, and went to see Rabbi Goldberg about it.

'I brought Benyamin up in the faith, gave him a very expensive bar mitzvah; it cost me a fortune to educate him, then he tells me last week he has decided to be a Christian. Rabbi, where did I go wrong?' pleaded Menachim.

'Funny, Menachim, that you should come to me,' commented Rabbi Goldberg. 'Like you I, too, brought my boy up in the faith, put him through University; that cost me a fortune, then one day he, too, tells me he has decided to become a Christian.'

'What did you do?' inquired Menachim

'I turned to God for the answer,' replied the Rabbi.

'And what did He say?' asked Menachim.

'God said, *'Funny you should come to me.....'*

Now hold that thought....I'll come back to it at the end

I was recently told that the best sermons are the stories from the heart, the stories about what is real and relevant, the stuff of life. The Word of God is all about that isn't it? So it is just as well that we can go into it today to talk about servanthood.

Rick Warren writes, *"The world defines greatness in terms of power, possessions, prestige, and position. If you can demand service from others, you've arrived. In our self-serving culture with its me-first mentality, acting like a servant is not a popular concept."* The reason being a servant is NOT popular is because it is so contrary to our inborn selfish sinful nature.

What is another word for servant?

- Assistant, attendant, helper, slave, dependent, domestic, drudge, helper, menial, hireling, minion, serf, server, cleaning person, live-in, subordinate?

What does it mean - A person employed by another especially in domestic duties is one definition.

– It's not a popular concept today because it denotes lack of status or worth, low or little pay, and definitely below what we are meant to aspire to in 'getting ahead' or succeeding in life. We might talk about public servants or servant leadership and servants are mentioned in ancient literature and arts and there are elements of darkness associated with servants too. But it is not a word that we use often today except that it is used many times in the Bible. I counted 19 times in the Old Testament and 12 times in the New Testament.

In our reading from the gospel of John, in two simple lines Jesus give us the primary example to follow...he washed the feet of the disciples and they needed to go and do likewise – not only for themselves but by implication, for others too. I imagine a servant doing just that sort of thing – in Jesus's day an extremely important cultural practice was to clean one's feet before entering a house. The custom at the time was that it was left to

the lowliest servant to perform the unwelcome duty of washing the dusty, dirty feet of strangers or travellers before they entered a house.

Jesus also makes it very plain that he did not expect from his specially-called followers (or us, by extension) something he himself did not do. This is the mark of a truly humble (servant) leader. I recall the words of the songthis is our God the “servant king”.

So we can understand very clearly that Jesus asks us to be humble and to serve.....when we talked about the definition of a servant before, we didn't mention humility, rather, 'servant' seemed more of a derogatory term. I think Jesus shows us the power of humility in these words of scripture.

Who are we to serve then?

That's when we turn to the second reading from Luke 10

– where the expert in religious law, perhaps a Pharisee, wants to know who in fact, is his neighbour....and of course Jesus explains this to him with the the parable of the Good Samaritan which follows and which we all know well.

Then Jesus asks the Pharisee, ³⁶“Now which of these three (who passed by)would you say was a neighbour to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked.

³⁷ The man replied, “The one who showed him mercy.”

Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.”

Basically “ go wash feet” do you think?

How are we to do this?

Preceding our reading, at the beginning of Luke 10, Jesus Sends Out the Seventy-Two (that's us actually)

Let me read it to you...

The Lord now chose seventy-two other disciples and sent them ahead in pairs to all the towns and places he planned to visit. ² These were his instructions to them: “The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields. ³ Now go, and remember that I am sending you

out as lambs among wolves. ⁴ Don't take any money with you, nor a traveller's bag, nor an extra pair of sandals. And don't stop to greet anyone on the road.

⁵ "Whenever you enter someone's home, first say, 'May God's peace be on this house.'

⁶ If those who live there are peaceful, the blessing will stand; if they are not, the blessing will return to you. ⁷ Don't move around from home to home. Stay in one place, eating and drinking what they provide. Don't hesitate to accept hospitality, because those who work deserve their pay.

⁸ "If you enter a town and it welcomes you, eat whatever is set before you. ⁹ Heal the sick, and tell them, 'The Kingdom of God is near you now.' ¹⁰ But if a town refuses to welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹ 'We wipe even the dust of your town from our feet to show that we have abandoned you to your fate. And know this—the Kingdom of God is near!'

Now we'll skip a few verses about consequences and pick up at V ¹⁶

Then he said to the disciples, "Anyone who accepts your message is also accepting me. And anyone who rejects you is rejecting me. And anyone who rejects me is rejecting God, who sent me."

¹⁷ When the seventy-two disciples returned, they joyfully reported to him, "Lord, even the demons obey us when we use your name!"

¹⁸ "Yes," he told them, "I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning! ¹⁹ Look, I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy, and you can walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them. Nothing will injure you. ²⁰ But don't rejoice because evil spirits obey you; rejoice because your names are registered in heaven."

Note the words "Returned" and "Rejoice"the 72 returned and rejoiced. These are important words because why? ...

When we are doing God's bidding and partnering in his work that is our only response surely? An the person we are serving is bound to be grateful even if they don't say. Kindness is sometimes lacking today.

Let me give you an example:

I was given the opportunity to be reminded of my calling to be a servant by being asked about a task ...late one Friday afternoon I received a phonecall asking if we could provide some assistance to a family. Mum had been in hospital and was discharged to bed rest –very difficult with 3 young kids. I organised an immediate response but what next? Who could I ask?

I knew it was up to me.

But how inconvenient ...I had my day planned - how was I going to fit in....cooking, visiting, finish a sermon, attend training all in a morning but ahhh but God's plan was very easy to see.. (needed to be easy for me to get it!!)

The thing is it all worked out in combination for the best outcome for all - I can't believe how well really ...God always has a perfect plan...

I did the food thingy, visited the family, got to the training on time and now I get to tell you about it because of what God hit me with in the middle of it...

The training was about how we can take a simple opportunity to share God's love by listening to someone's story and relating it to a bible story and/or the telling of our own story in a minute or two of testimony.

The trainer mentioned the Luke 10 verses I just read with emphasis on the words return and rejoice. You see the steps are simply these:

1. Connecting through conversations - the telling of stories (as when Jesus sent out the 72),
2. Being obedient – and then reporting back (the return of the 72 to report back),
3. Then the rejoicing over their obedience
(the 72 didn't have to produce results - they just had to be obedient and do what Jesus had asked them to do – Love the Lord, love their neighbour and 'wash their feet' just as he bid them do)

Back to us serving our neighbour. We are very good at providing programmes or activities based in or around our church plant aren't we? Stuff like after school activities, Music and movement for toddlers, holiday programmes, seniors' get-togethers and so on. And this is very necessary and good. The trick we all face is how to make those connections work for God. Incidentally a colleague I spoke to recently told me his Anglican church (on Auckland's north shore) recently started a monthly service designed for grandparents to bring their grandchildren and its going really well. Idea!

So yesterday I learnt that because I am being obedient (connecting) - (go and make disciples Matt 28) I can be confident in sharing stories with my neighbour about my faith, then telling somebody about what I shared and how I'm going to reconnect (returning) which gives me cause to rejoice – not because I've made a convert but because I've been obedient. It is God's work to make the convert. What a relief!

I have certainly tended towards the view that in providing social services programmes we are providing connecting points with our community (and that's very important) but the bridge between those activities and not being afraid in introducing a loving God doesn't rely on me producing a result! I just gotta do my bit – be an obedient servant!

After washing the disciples feet in John 13 Jesus says:

¹⁶ I tell you the truth, slaves (servants) are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them. A cause to Rejoice!

What about those connecting points?

We are in another busy year and it seems already that the inevitability of social responsibility falling to the charitable and NGO sectors ever more quickly as access to Government or local Government funding shrinks and places *more* emphasis and *greater* pressure on compliance and accountability. It makes me thankful in some ways that this Diocese seeks to use primarily its own resources. It is tough supporting those whose ministry could develop much further with extra financial support, when they are faced with reductions that won't maintain what exists now, let alone meeting projected plans.

When there are funds available for families in need we are often asked for rent or power arrears or extras such as school and/or holiday camps. What we have seen in the beginning months of 2015, is more requests for very basic needs such as food.

This is an excerpt from a draft community network submission to our local Nelson City Council, regarding a proposed reduction of \$250,000.00 in 2015 community assistance funding. *“Demand for food parcels, for example, continues to climb, many struggle with unemployment, ill-health and high-cost poor-quality housing”*. Yes, we all have to 'cut our cloth' but to value physical infrastructure over social infrastructure is surely denying that basic community tenet of 'people first'.

Today more than ever as the Christian church we are surely called to be the demonstration of the love and the peace of Christ, grounded in the Gospel of Christ by using these 'connecting points' within our communities to be obedient.

Church of England Newspaper 10/4/15 talking about larger congregations says this – “Leadership is key...

Most of these churches know what they are doing, why they are doing it, and what they plan to achieve in the next few years. Such characteristics are very attractive and draw others in. They are also hugely engaged in the community with an enormous variety of opportunities for service, often in very creative and imaginative ways. “

I want to encourage you – in Susan you have a leader with a huge servant heart so well connected in this community.....

What does the community need? Where can you grow and develop those connecting points. Nothing is set in concrete. Get busy for God – give it a go.

St. Augustine writes,
“*In the non-essentials, freedom;
in the essentials, unity;
in all things, love.*”

Andfrom the beginning story remember....'God said to Rabbi Goldberg, 'Funny you should come to me.....' Let's pray, be obedient and rejoice.

May I pray, Lord Jesus our saviour,

Today, help us to pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal to us a single person He wants us to serve? Don't think about a list of twenty, just one single person that the Lord will lay upon our heart. Lord we ask you for the grace to love this person unconditionally and to serve him or her with our whole being. This is a prayer that you will answer and we remember, *actions speak louder than words.*

Thank you that you only ask us to be obedient. Bless us we today as we go - lighten our hearts with love for you and a rejoicing that we are yours and that you love us so. Let us not be complacent about that but want to know you more. Thank you that when we hear your prompting and are obedient you do bless us with your peace. I pray you will continue to bless us by your inspirational and comforting Holy Spirit so that we radiate confidence and joy to all around us so that people know there's something different about us and want to know how to get it too.

May you and I follow in the sandals of Jesus and become foot washers.

May all honour and glory be yours, through Jesus we pray Amen

Reflection questions- Are you energised by your service to others? Or drained?

Is this a time to consider whether you are serving in your giftings? And how can you check?