



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“CALLED TO BE SERVANTS”

Scripture Lessons: Psalm 116; Luke 17:7-10

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, February 24, 2019
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

Luke 17:7-10

‘Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from ploughing or tending sheep in the field, “Come here at once and take your place at the table”? Would you not rather say to him, “Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink”? Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, “We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!”

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Let us pray...

Almighty and Everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be pleasing, acceptable, and even joyful in your sight, for you are our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

When Jesus posed the question: “Who do you say that I am?” Peter responded by saying, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And to that Jesus said, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.”

To be certain, it is none other than God Almighty who reveals to the human heart the true nature of Jesus as “Emmanuel” ...“God with us” – the Christ, the Messiah! Of course, Jesus has been described in a variety of ways. In the gospel according to John, Jesus refers to himself as “the bread of life,” “the light of the world,” “the gate,” “the good shepherd,” “the resurrection and the life,” “the true vine.”

Those images and others paint for us a beautiful portrait of the eternal Son of God who lived and died and rose again in order that we might receive forgiveness from our sins and be reconciled to God (cf. 9.07). But I’m curious, of all the depictions of Jesus Christ that are available to us by which we can glean something of who Jesus was and is, if we could choose only one, which one would we choose?

Perhaps some of us would be drawn to the image of Jesus as the “firstborn over all creation,” or, the “Word” that was made flesh and dwelled among us full of grace and truth. Still for others, the presiding image of choice might be that of the “Chief Cornerstone,” or our “Deliverer” or “Mediator.”

My personal favorite is the “Lamb of God.” And when I think about the Lamb of God, I am reminded of the time when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to him in the wilderness. John declared: “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” For me, that description is a beautiful harmony of the old and the new because upon hearing that statement, I also hear echoes of God’s law which called for the sacrifice of a spotless, unblemished lamb as the atonement for sin.

Jesus as the Lamb of God not only brings to mind how Jesus was that lamb and how he showed patience in his suffering, but it also shows his willingness to lay down his life for those he loves. The Apostle Paul has reminded us that Jesus did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but rather emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness (cf. Phil. 2:6-7). In this way, the Bible says, the “Son of Man” came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mat. 20:26-28).

I dare say, if we are to know who Jesus really is, then we must take to heart who Jesus is as a servant. What’s more, we must also begin to understand ourselves as servants.

But, if we are being honest, we tend to gravitate toward other descriptions, don’t we? We’d rather gravitate to that Biblical example which describes us as “children of God” and there are so many examples to choose from in the scriptures...like “saints” and “elect.” And we like those titles! But a servant? Being a servant suggests that someone else is our master, and that doesn’t sit very well with those of us who would like to think that we are in control our life!

“Oh, sure we submit to God,” we say, but tell me, is it a full or partial submission? How often is it that we give God just enough or we presume some mutually agreeable portion of our time and talents and treasure? Maybe this, God, but not that! Perhaps not now, but later...“at some more convenient time, if you please.”

We end up rationing the substance of our life as if we have ultimate control over it; however, in our New Testament Lesson this morning, we see that our lives are not negotiable. We neither write the job description nor do we determine the hours or set the wage. No! All of that is handled by our master!

Friends, in life and in faith, it is one thing to recognize God as master and ourselves as servants, or slaves; but, to actually live into that kind of relationship, well, that's easier said than done!

This morning we heard from Julie about her experience with Stephen Ministry, which really is a servant ministry. Stephen Ministers are people who have gone through a significant amount of training in order to learn how to listen and to love, how to be graceful enough to walk with people whose walk isn't easy, indeed, theirs is a humble posture...the posture of a servant.

Yet, here again, all too often we focus on other descriptions of the Christian life, choosing to live as "heirs" of the grace of life...that Biblical title sounds wonderful! Oh, are we not "chosen" and "beloved"...are we not a "royal priesthood" - the Bible tells us that too; but, if that is all we have to say about ourselves -- if our identity orbits exclusively around those kinds of lovely titles -- then the very least, we run the risk of thinking quite highly of ourselves.

And we are special...that is the truth, God loves us! But our specialness is only a half-truth, if, in the same breath, we do not also testify to the limits of our goodness -- the limits of our authority, if we do not yield to God!

Yes, we are the "Body of Christ" and Jesus is the "Head" of that body; and, yes, we are the "Bride of Christ" and Jesus is the "Bridegroom," but God in Christ is also our Master and we are his Servants.

Oh, make no mistake about it, we are not in control, for we are not God, and at no point does God serve at our bidding! God is not some Genie in a Bottle, who answers our prayers according to our will. No! It has always been the case, and it always will be the case, that "Thy" will be done! And Christ's will has been revealed to us in the scriptures -- if we want to know how to live and love and how to serve, it's right here! And here in the Word of God written, we learn that while Jesus undoubtedly is a servant -- he is not our fellow servant, not in the sense that he is our peer...he is not our equal...he is our "Master" and our God! We will not find anything in the Bible about a saving faith coming from the confession that "Jesus is our close friend." There is no affirmation which would suggest that by saying "Jesus is altogether our helpful guide," that we can somehow be saved. No! The confession that the Bible references is the confession that Jesus is "Lord!"

We haven't talked much about the title of "Lord," but it is one of the most important titles for our Savior, because to say that Jesus is Lord, is to say that Jesus is the sovereign ruler over our life, but not just our life, but the life of the world, for the Bible tells us that Jesus is not simply a Lord among Lords, but the "Lord of Lords."

We have a name for this table...we call it "The Lord's Table," and we will soon gather around it not because we are so worthy of participating in this feast God has prepared; indeed, we have done absolutely nothing to deserve it! In fact, our very best posture is that of humility...precisely because we don't deserve it at all!

To put it another way...God's grace is never in our debt. If anything, we are indebted to God; but more than being indebted to God, at this table and in this morning's little parable, we would have ourselves to know, and God would lead us to believe, that we have been bought with a price; that, by grace through faith, we affirm that Jesus served us to the bitter end and far beyond – that he yielded his life so that we may come to know that he is none other than the Son of God – the very Lord of love and peace – the Lord of years; and that, by believing in his name, we may have life and we may have life abundant!

As we prepare to celebrate this Holy Supper, may we do so as servants of Jesus Christ, recognizing and affirming that we are also called to serve...and when that happens, we are blessed! We are blessed with grace upon grace in the form of provision, protection, discipline, vision, hope -- oh, all of these gifts and others -- to that glorious end when we too might hear those wonderful words: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

In the meantime, we need to live that way...as servants, that is! Sure, we can live as God's "children" and as "sheep" that are loved and tended to – we can live as a "Holy Nation"...but if we don't live as God's servants, then we have failed to model our lives after the one who served us, and serves us still!

Jesus put it this way: "Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave" (cf. Matthew 20:26-28). And so we serve one another, as God in Christ has served us, bearing witness in every good way to the wonderful truth of God's love, knowing full well that in serving one another we are also serving God!

Let us pray...

Loving God, may we never presume to have earned your favor; indeed, we have only done our duty and nothing more. Help us to live as your faithful servants and to remember that, as servants, we are never ever greater than our Master. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.*