

Sermon 24b 2021: Faith to Live as Servants of the God who Serves

Introduction

In this year of *Faith Matters*, we as individuals and as a community

Are considering what the Christian faith is;

We are focusing on who we believe in when we talk about God;

And what our faith in God means for our lives.

We are looking at how we live in a way that reflects our faith in this God who saves;

And the life that involves God in personal ways, not just on Sundays or at church;

But day by day on our own, in our families, among our friends,

In our vocations, at school, and in the world around us.

In this year of *Faith Matters*, we are considering how our lives and our words

Can open the way for others to know this God who loves us so;

And who is calling us into the life and love of God and Christian community.

All the scriptures speak to *Faith Matters* and the scriptures for this Sunday

Speak boldly to the love of God for each one of us

And to the challenge we all have in following in faith in our daily lives;

As servants of the God who serves.

For that's the call of the Christian faith and the call we hear clearly this morning,

The Christian life is a life of service

And true greatness lies only in serving others for their sakes and not for ours.

Like many of us who live in a culture of expected returns and accolades for good works;

James and John thought that this life of service and sacrifice and pain

Which Jesus was about to endure

And which He was calling others to endure was a means to some end.

The life of service, simply put, was something that Jesus and they would have to endure

In order to secure a kingdom of God;

And to reach some place of honor, say at Jesus' right and left hands.

They expected that in putting their faith in Jesus and in following Him;
They would be part of securing a kingdom in which they would have power
Rather than vulnerability;
Prestige rather than lowliness,
And honor rather than humiliation.

Being servants, they seemed to think when they asked Jesus for seats of power,
Was an unfortunate step they would have to take in order to become the masters.

But what Jesus knew
And what those disciples around Him would come to understand;
Including James and John;
Was that the way of servanthood and self-sacrifice
Is not the way to a different kind of life;
It is itself the life of faith, the life in God.

Best Camper

When I was in 7th and 8th grades, I was sent off to an Episcopal Church summer camp
With two hundred other Episcopalians from around the Diocese.

My first summer at Camp Crucis, I discovered that at the end of the session,
The campers and counselors all selected one person as the best camper
And that person received a Bishop signed Book of Common Prayer;
Pretty low stakes, but it was Middle School.

As we drove back home, I made some kind of private commitment to myself
That the next summer I would win the award and the Prayer Book.

The next summer I went out of my way to put others first, to serve others before me;
When someone struck out in a baseball game or dropped an easy fly ball,
I gave a pat on the back and a word of encouragement;
At meals I made sure those around me were served first,
Before I put anything on my plate;
I put others' ideas ahead of my own when we were doing some project
And tried to be as helpful as I could to as many people as I could.

I even picked up the prayer books and hymnals after daily worship and put them away
Before running off to the morning's first activity;
I enjoyed acting as a servant and was pretty sure it was working
And I was going to win the best camper award;
Until the young priest from our church, Father Steve Swann;
Invited me to take a walk with him after Evening Prayer.

He told me how proud he was of me for being such a good Christian;
And that I was clearly someone who had made a difference all week;
The kind of difference that I would remember to practice going forward;
Because it was the serving behavior that God wanted from me all the time;
But that the award was going to Diane Berkeley, who broke her leg the day before;
And really needed some cheering up.

Wow, I thought, all those good works and the call to live like that all the time;
And no award, maybe this Christian life was going to be different than I thought.

Serving God and others for the sake of serving and not as a way to get something;
Is how we live each day as though our faith matters;
Serving God and others gives us a greater sense
Of Jesus' grace and goodness and love;
In His life of service and in His death and resurrection;
Serving God and others for the sake of serving offers others
A taste of that grace and goodness and love we're coming to know;
And will open their hearts to the God who serves.

The Rabbi's Tale

There's a story told in many different ways about an old monastery
That was once a great and thriving Christian community.
It was a place of learning and hospitality and service
A blessing to the community and to the world.

Over the years, though, the community dwindled;
Until a time when there were only four brothers and the Abbot in residence.

The topic of conversation every evening inevitably moved
To thoughts of what would become of them when these five monks died.
Who would continue the ministry?

One night, as the Abbot lay sleepless, praying and considering what he must do
To save this dying community;
He decided that he would go and see the old hermit in the woods, a rabbi
To ask his advice.

He set out the next morning after morning prayers to find the old man;
And when he arrived at his humble home, he was invited in for tea.

They drank tea, read scripture, talked and walked together
Reflecting on their lives and the future of religion and God's community;
How in both faiths, participation had dwindled
And people seemed to have lost interest in God.

As evening approached and the Abbott had to leave,
He turned once more to this man of God and asked,
“Is there nothing you can tell me that will save the monastery?”

The rabbi frowned and said, “I can give you no promises about the future,
But I will tell you that the Messiah is among you.”

Upon his return, the other brothers pressed him to learn what the hermit had told him.
The Abbott said he had been of no specific help,
But had said as he was leaving that “the Messiah is among you.”

All four brothers thought, the messiah is among you? But who?
All of them retired that evening wondering who the Messiah among them could be.
Certainly it was the Abbott: he was a man of God and a great man of prayer. Maybe so.
It couldn't be Brother Jerome, he was always so cantankerous;
Surely he is not the Messiah, and yet the identity could be a great mystery.

It certainly wasn't brother Robert, he rarely spoke to anyone,
And yet he was the first person at your side when you needed help.

Or how about brother Walker, he was always kind and gentle, but he slept so much.
Or could it be me? No that was not possible, was it?

The brothers were changed from that day onward;
They began to treat one another as if each one was the Messiah, the Lord's chosen.
Who knew, perhaps one of them was the Messiah;
And what better place to start to love and serve another;
To hold each other in the highest esteem and serve one another as the Messiah.

Gradually people from the town began to walk again in the gardens of the monastery
Or to sit in prayer in the great chapel;
And even to speak with the brothers as they went about their duties.

The townspeople felt that there was such a quality of peace and contentment in the place
Couples came to be married in the Chapel
Younger men and women began to talk with the brothers about the life of faith.

After a few more years, three young men decided to join the community
And took their vows to join in this community of service and love and friendship.
The monastery grew and once more became a place of light and life and love in the world

But let me say again that God does not want us to be servants
And self-sacrificing followers of Jesus
And treat one another as if we were the Messiah as a means to some end;
Even to restore the monastery or build up the Church;
God calls us to live our faith in lives of service;
Because that is, in and of itself, the Christian life.

The Gospel and the Life of Service

Think about it.

This God who we worship is like no other gods.

God is the one who chooses to serve not just to be worshiped and adored.

Other gods have been revealed through time so that women and men could serve them;

This God, our God, begins from the other end;

God comes to people like us as the suffering servant to liberate them

So that they may celebrate their freedom from sin and death

So that they may celebrate their freedom by serving others.

Jesus says just this in today's Gospel,

“For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve,

And to give His life as a ransom for many.”

This is the good news of the Christian faith that has been celebrated

For nearly 2,000 years;

And this is the challenge of the Christian life today.

When we give of ourselves to God and others,

When we serve others with our time and our talents and our treasure,

When we put others first, treating one another as if they were the Messiah,

Then we share in the abundant life of God

Then we share in the joy and the contentment and the peace and love

That is found in the life of servanthood

Then we'll know our faith matters every day of our lives.

And so as we focus on how *Faith Matters* in our daily lives;

I invite you again to the life in God

To the life of service, the life of serving others.

Who knows to what levels of greatness we may experience

As we descend to serve others in the name of Jesus.

Amen.