

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost and Feast of St. Bartholomew, August 23, 2015, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 22:24-30

"How Do You Want Me To Serve – and Where?"

Former world heavyweight boxing champ, Muhammad Ali, was well known for bragging, "I'm the greatest." Just before take-off on an airline flight, the flight attendant reminded Ali to fasten his seatbelt. "Superman don't need no seatbelt," Ali told her. The flight attendant replied, "Superman don't need no airplane, either." Ali quietly fastened his seatbelt.

Now, no one would ever mistake Muhammad Ali's cocky attitude for Christian virtue. Humility and selflessness are supposed to be the mark of the believer in Jesus Christ - so why do the apostles get into this silly debate over which of them was the greatest, especially when you consider this conversation took place at the Last Supper, the last time that they would gather together with our Lord at a peaceful time, the night before Jesus would go to the cross? Jesus had just announced that one of the twelve was about to betray Him. The disciples exclaimed "Surely, not I?" in Mark 14:19. Can you just imagine what they might have said, "Well, it couldn't be me?" "Why not?" Do you think you're better than the rest of us?" From there, I'll just bet things heated up quickly.

They had argued about the very same thing while they walked at some distance from Jesus, thinking that He couldn't hear what they were discussing (Mark 9:33-37). But Jesus knew what they were talking about and used this occasion to teach them about "childlike" humility. I am sure you remember not too long ago the Gospel of Mark told us how the mother of James and John came to Jesus to ask if her sons could sit on His right and left in the kingdom. Scripture said that the other disciples became indignant (Mark 10:35-45). What right had these two brothers to try and claim the top spots in the kingdom? Jesus had taught them that the greatest should become the servant and the one who wished to be first should be the slave of all, adding, "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*"

But in spite of these and many other lessons, here they were again, right on the eve of the Lord's death, arguing over which of them was the greatest! This shows us that although we can have this lesson in our heads, it takes a while to put it into practice. Just when we think that we've learned it - then someone does something to bug us and we think, "I'm a better servant of Christ than he is!" Although we may not get into a verbal debate over it, the thought of our heart is, "I'm greater than he is!" So we all have to keep coming back to this fundamental lesson: **The greatest in God's sight are those who humbly serve!**

The Bible clearly teaches that every believer has been given at least one spiritual gift and is to employ it in serving one another (1 Peter 4:10). Being a servant of Christ is more than just signing up to provide a Wednesday Night dinner, or to volunteer to do some other job at the church. Being a servant is a mindset, a state of mind, where each day you make yourself available to Christ and ask Him to use you in His service in **whatever ways He chooses.**

It is funny, today being the Feast of St. Bartholomew; I was very blessed to serve there, with Marilyn at my side, along with my buddy Deacon John Reitz. He and I worked very closely – so closely sometimes that people couldn't tell the difference; we were “frick and frack!” We worked very well together and through the grace of God achieved many fine things, especially in the IT Department. We took a church, similar to this, into WiFi wonderland and made everything interconnected. It is interesting with this being the Feast of St. Bartholomew that this comes to mind: when I graduated from Trinity School for Ministry, I thought I was coming back to Jacksonville, Fl., but the Lord had a different idea. I did not make a mistake in doing this but I, even to this day, ask the Lord “How do you want me to serve today – and where?” For nine years He said “stay put.” Almost nine years, when I was at St. Bartholomew's, that I was needed there, until somewhere around July and August of last year, when that no longer was the message. The message was “be open” and He made it clear where we are to be – thanks be to God! I still ask that question, not that I am looking to go anywhere. No, I am here for the long haul, but I want to know HOW He wants me to serve, and the WHERE is in this community, is in this church, and how whether it is a Kiwanis event, or the Chamber of Commerce, or downtown at a candlelight vigil, or anything else. Or maybe it is at Sims Funeral Home – just before Christmas – I had the privilege of serving with my brother Gray, there at the service for people who have lost a loved one during that year. How do you want me to serve, and where? Whatever way He chooses:

- It may be to speak a word about Jesus to someone who needs Him;
- it may be to offer cheerful help to someone in need; (did you ever stop to think that at the Peace – you are talking to someone and they just don't look right? They are not running on all cylinders – their mind is off someplace else? Maybe that is time for you to ask how you might be able to be there for them.
- it may be to listen to a person who needs sympathy or understanding.
- It might even be to use private message of Facebook to find out what is going on in that person's life.
- Whatever the job, your daily attitude is, “Lord, here I am. Use me as YOUR servant.”

Jesus was and is our model servant. During the Last Supper, Jesus got up, He girded Himself with a towel, took a basin of water, and the disciples' feet. I think that this happened after this dispute among the disciples – and what a lesson it was!

Have you ever gone out at night and looked into the sky and thought about the fact that your eye cannot even begin to see the billions of galaxies and stars that are in the universe? Or have you gone to the Creation Museum and seen their display about the size of the universe - and you realize that God is even bigger than that! Even the powerful Hubble telescope cannot get to the end of the universe. Remember - Jesus spoke the entire universe into existence by the power of His Word!

Peter, James, and John were blessed to get a brief glimpse of Jesus' glory on the Mount of Transfiguration and they were awestruck (Luke 9:28-36). Later, on the Isle of Patmos, John,

who had laid his head on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper, got a further revelation of Christ in His heavenly glory. His response was not to say, "Oh, hi, Lord, good to see you again!" Rather, he fell on his face at Christ's feet (Revelation 1:12-17). This Lord of glory left the splendor of heaven and took on human flesh so that **He could accomplish our salvation**. He could have come in all His splendor, demanding our instant allegiance on the penalty of death, but instead He took on the form of a servant and humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

Christ's willingness to serve did not in any way rob Him of the ultimate authority that will be His. He says, "*I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me.*" (Luke 22:29) He is coming again and He will conquer all His enemies and reign over all the earth. But according to God's sovereign plan, even though He deserves and one day will have ultimate supremacy, the first time He came to earth was as a humble servant to show us how we should serve Him and serve one another. If Jesus, the Almighty Creator, willingly served, then shouldn't we, who deserve nothing except judgment, offer ourselves in faithful service to God? Jesus tells the disciples, "*You are those who have stood by Me in My trials*" (Luke 22:28). At first glance, this verse does not seem unusual. We all know that Jesus was tried when the devil tempted Him in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). We know that He went through the awful agony of Gethsemane, followed by His trial and crucifixion. But we tend to think that between those two terrible events, everything was smooth sailing for Jesus. But, the disciples were not standing with Jesus during these two events. He had not yet chosen them when He was tempted by Satan. And, they all fled and deserted Him at His final hour of trial.

After Jesus had successfully resisted the devil in the wilderness, we read that the devil "*left Him until an opportune time*" (Luke 4:13). Although Jesus did not have a sinful nature tempting Him from within, like we do, He was perpetually bombarded by the enemy of our souls. In spite of all these temptations, Jesus faithfully resisted sin and humbled Himself, serving the Father's purpose, even to the point of death.

There are many Christians who will serve God as long as there is no opposition and things are going relatively smoothly –

- but what happens when criticism or opposition comes? Do you pack up the tent and go home?
- What happens when we are treated unfairly?
- What happens when we are misunderstood or when people question our motivation?
- Do we keep serving or do we quit with the protest and attitude, "If that's the kind of treatment I get for serving, I'm out of here! Let someone else serve!"

Jesus is our great example of serving faithfully even through many trials.

Although the disciples had stood with Jesus up to this point in His earthly ministry, even with some intense opposition, Jesus knew that in just a few hours, they would all run from Him, fleeing for their lives. Not even the "inner circle" of Peter, James, and John, would not even go near the anguish that Jesus would face in the Garden of Gethsemane. What did they do? They

fell asleep! Jesus had to face His final trial alone. Please turn with me to page 1679 in your Pew Bibles to John 16:32 so we can see what He told them in that Upper Room, just before He was arrested -- "*But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.*" In spite of loneliness and being misunderstood, Jesus never strayed from and faithfully served His Father's purpose. His fellowship with the Father was the sustaining factor when no one else understood. In this, too, Jesus is our great example. We are called to serve Him even when we feel lonely and misunderstood – or too tired to get up on a Sunday, or even when we might feel somewhat depressed.

Christ's amazing love is the only explanation for why He would leave the glory of heaven and submit Himself to all of the abuse and hardship that He went through so that He could secure - so He could pay for our salvation. Have you ever pulled up to a toll booth and been told that the car in front of you paid your toll? We used to do that when we were in seminary, and then all of a sudden one day – we were sitting at a table having lunch and when we asked for the check we were told that it was paid for! Isn't that a surprise; isn't that a privilege? It truly is! Jesus did that for us – He paid our toll, He paid for and provided a meal that we will have together in just a few moments as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Just before Jesus girded Himself with a towel and began the task of a lowly servant - washing the disciples' feet, John 13:1 states that Jesus loved His own who were in the world and He now showed them the extent of His love.

The apostle Paul was driven by his love of Christ. He said that the life he now lived in the flesh, he lived by faith in the Son of God, and then he adds, "*who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me*" (Galatians 2:20). In the eighth chapter of Romans, Paul reaches a crescendo when he reflects on God's great love in Christ. He states that even if we are put to death for Christ's sake, "*we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.*" Nothing, he states, absolutely nothing "*shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 8:35-39).

Just as Jesus Christ served because of His great love for us and Paul served because he was totally captivated by Christ's love, so we are called to serve because of Christ's love for us and our love for Him. God's love as seen in Christ, and especially in His sacrificial death, is the great motive for anything and everything that we do in service for Him. **Jesus Christ is our great example of servanthood.**

I read about a church in Santa Fe, New Mexico, that has a hand-lettered sign over the only door into the sanctuary: SERVANTS' ENTRANCE. There isn't any way in or out of that church except through the service door (*Christianity Today* [9/16/91], p. 42). That's how every church should be! It's a place for servants only. Who's the greatest in God's kingdom? Those who humbly serve as Jesus did. **How do you want me to serve today, Lord, and where?**