

**“We’re Better Together: Serving “**  
Mark 10:43-45 (NRSV); Philippians 2:1-4 (NIV); Galatians 6:2

Today we continue in our Lenten ‘disciplines’ of exploring just how we are **called to fulfill God’s purposes** for our individual **lives** in the context of the larger **community**. The author of Hebrews speaks to this ‘corporate responsibility’ of believers where we read: ***“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another.”*** (Hebrews 10:24-25)

In the past 3 weeks we have considered just how **we are** to BE **‘better together’** ... using a keyword in the title that referred to an underlying Biblical concept. Let’s see how you do in hitting your mental ‘REFRESH’ button: First...We are better together when we are... **“Reaching out.”** (AKA... ‘EVANGELISM’). Second... We are also ‘better together’ when we are... **“Belonging.”** (AKA... ‘FELLOWSHIP’). And third, we are ‘better together’ when we are... **“Growing.”** (AKA... ‘DISCIPLESHIP’).

And as we consider the fourth ‘character trait’ of a healthy Christian community, you’ll be happy to know that there are no more ‘code words.’ No more ‘Christian-eze’ language that is exclusive to our faith. Intimidating words like ‘evangelism’ or ‘discipleship.’ This week we will take a look at how we are ‘better together’ when we are **“Serving.”** (AKA... ‘SERVING’)

We have two passages before us today from the two best examples of ‘serving’ in the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul and the Savior Jesus. In both of these readings, the emphasis is on OTHERS rather than SELF. The importance of putting the interests of others ahead of one’s own. That our goal in life... individually, or collectively... shouldn’t be about BEING served, but to serve. No matter what the circumstances might be...

Paul’s entire letter to the church at Philippi was to **thank** them for their **solidarity** with him while he was in **prison**, and to **encourage** them to **unity** and humble **service** to one another **in Christ**. Paul expressed his **gratitude** for his co-laborers in Christ that despite the **trials** that He was going through in Jesus’ name... no matter the **uncertainty** that they faced with their leader in exile... that they were still there **supporting** him, and living out the type of **exemplary**

**service** that he had left for them. Even from a prison cell the great Apostle was ‘encouraging’ them, ‘spurring them on to love and good deeds.’

The importance of Paul’s personal ‘context’ for his gratitude, his solidarity with his brethren, and his service to others is borne witness to by the ‘context’ of this 4 verse passage. Note that first word of verse 1: **“Therefore...”** It is words like this that point us to what comes before. Which is this: **“For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well... the same struggle that I had and still have.”** (Phil. 1:29-30, NRSV)

The privilege of believing... AND suffering. I am reminded of Jesus in NT, and Job in the OT. Both Known as ‘suffering servants.’ Both reminders that to serve others is not always easy. Sometimes it’s a downright DRAG. Sometimes we can get awful TIRED of taking care of someone else. A friend or family member. Or sometimes as part of one’s employ. Like Paul, one can feel ‘imprisoned.’ But just as we should consider it a **privilege** of being a believer, a follower of Christ, so too should we consider it privilege to **suffer...** to **serve...** for Him as well.

We KNOW in our hearts that **servicing** others, no matter the cost, is a worthy, noble use of our time. But how do we continue to persevere in doing it when there are so many OTHER responsibilities in our lives. We have jobs. Families. Personal care of ourselves. You know, like ‘sleeping,’ ‘eating,’ ‘reading,’ growing in our business, personal, spiritual lives. How do we ‘spur OURSELVES’ on to ‘love and good deeds’... Both within our church body and outside of it?

As I read Paul’s words to his brethren at the church in Philippi, it seems to me is encouraging them to take a look at the all of the benefits that THEY have received as a part of Christ’s body, the church. He challenges them to take a look at how they themselves have been ‘served’ by the Triune God: ‘If YOU have had ANY ... **encouragement** from being united with Christ... ANY **comfort** from His love... ANY **fellowship** in the Holy Spirit... ANY **tenderness** and **compassion** shown to you by God, or God’s people...’ then what are YOU doing to pass along, in the words of that old song, ‘that lovin’ feeling?!’

I think back to the days before Barrie and I agreed that God was calling us to seminary. Aside from her insightful observations and advice, a big part of why I heeded God’s call was because of the community of faith that had meant so much to me. Because of the

**encouragement** I received... because of the **love** and **fellowship** that **comforted** me... because of the **tenderness** and **compassion** shown me by that body of Christ... I felt a strong sense of 'pay back' necessary. (Certainly NOT in the negative connotation... in this case, 'pay back was heaven!') That just as I had been served by God, and God's people, so then must I in turn serve others. In being a part of that church, I was **blessed... to BE a blessing!**

In the same way, I hope that you realize how blessed you all are to be a part of THIS fellowship. That as you CONTINUE to **encourage** one another, **comforting** one another in **love**, enjoying your **fellowship** through the Spirit, demonstrating **tenderness** and **compassion**, you will grow in your conviction to take that service to one another OUT THERE. To those who don't HAVE this kind of loving, supporting environment. Like perhaps, someone who lives out in the 'mission/MorganField.' Or in your own neighborhood. Or workplace. As you ponder the love God has shown you through His people, may you look in the mirror each morning... I know, sometimes a scary sight... and pledge to God your Maker, "*I am **blessed to BE a blessing.***"

Aside from that 'self-conviction' of the need to serve others, there is also the call to be a blessing that comes from one another. From other 'pieces of iron' in the body of Christ. I lift up those words of exhortation from Paul to his fellow 'church members': "***make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind (purpose)... not looking to your own interests, but to the interests of the others.***" (Philippians 2:2, 4)

The JOY that Paul derived in looking after the interest of others, rather than his own, was IN-complete, IN-sufficient, IN-adequate, without those IN-side his community of faith. The only way that his satisfaction of service to others would be made complete was through sharing in the same love, spirit, and purpose with his co-laborers. He certainly would have resonated with the title of our sermon series/study: "**We are better TOGETHER!**"

As I consider the different ways that this congregation has served in both the past and the present, there is LITTLE doubt that the JOY that you all, and indeed, I have had is INCOMPLETE without 'like-minded' fellow church members. Mission trips to Mexico, Alabama, or Vinton. Tutoring/Lunch buddies at OPES. Conferences at Mo-Ranch, Montreat, Cursillo. Habitat for Humanity. Working at OPFP. Bowling for Kids' Sake with BB/BS. But you know how

these, and other opportunities for service to others, have any level of 'success' and involvement? NOT by the pastor standing up in the pulpit and asking for volunteers! But rather, by one of you beggars showing another beggar where to find food for your soul. To feast on that most satisfying 'banquet' of making a difference in another person's life. For you to look one of your beloved church family members in the eye and say '*Come and join me. Come serve with me. **Make my joy complete!***' May the words of Hebrews also be YOUR words to God: "Lord, help **me** consider how **I** may spur others on toward **love** and **good deeds... encouraging** my sisters and brothers...

And finally, moreso that any voice of our own... or the encouragement of others... the example that we must lift up above all others as a 'selfless servant' is, of course, JESUS! For me, in those words of Mark, there is no more powerful statement made by Jesus as to his purpose in coming to earth. No stronger exhortation to those of us who follow Him as to how we can best mirror his character. Most definitely, one of those Scriptural 'arrows' that I encourage you to have in your 'quiver': "***For the Son of Man came NOT to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.***" (Mark 10:45)

Jesus -- the King of kings and Lord of lords... our Redeemer, counselor, and friend... the Great 'I AM'.... Says to you and me, 'My purpose for coming was not to be waited on hand and foot, but to do that for YOU! To pay the ultimate ransom... my life... for YOURS. THAT's how important you are to me!' Jesus' unconditional love and sacrifice for us is REAL. It just doesn't get any more REAL than that! He says to us, 'Just as I have come to serve others, you should do the same. That's how people will KNOW that you are my disciple... if you love them like I have loved you.'

At our Thursday morning men's group meeting, Mark was recounting a story in which he witnessed a driver damage her car by driving over some railroad tracks on Sallier. This was after a long day at the hospital with Cissie, and he shared of how reluctant he was to get involved. He just wanted to go home, get comfortable, and have a nice cold adult beverage. (I can appreciate that.. Sunday pm!)

Aside from being 'convicted' by his fellow car-passengers (his wife and sister-in-law, he also thought about what Jesus would be thinking. What would Jesus say, and do, if he were

there in the back seat of the car. Which led our study group into a discussion of the importance of thinking of Jesus in more REAL terms. Like he's in the car with you. Or in the dinner table chair beside you. Or in the pew with you. That is in part why I will on occasion use pictures of 'Jesus'... or, more precisely, of actors portraying Jesus. It is not to create some sort of graven image, or idol worship. It simply to think of Christ as a REAL person who walked, talked, ate, wept, laughed... and most importantly, served, suffered and died for US. As long as we don't get hung up on whether or not Jesus is a blonde-haired, blue-eyed white guy. OR that God is a white-haired, quick-witted cigar smoking man like George Burns... or, a middle-aged black man with a velvety-smooth voice like Morgan Freeman. That while we may not be able to fathom with our finite human minds the magnitude of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, their presence with us is nonetheless REAL. Just as real as our own internal voice, or the voices of our friends and family.

In closing, I'd leave you with a few verses that immediately follow Paul's exhortation to his friends at Philippi to put others ahead of themselves:

***"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: <sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; <sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. (Phil. 2:5-7)*** The Scriptures tell us that we too have been made 'in the image of God.' Like His only begotten Son, Jesus. And so, like Jesus, let us 'take on the very nature of a servant.' To give our lives for others. And as we do, they won't see us... but Jesus in US...