

“Serve One Another in Love”  
Rev. Brian R. Louis, Faith Presbyterian Church, June 9, 2024

“<sup>13</sup> You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh<sup>[a]</sup>; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”

<sup>12</sup> When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. <sup>13</sup> “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. <sup>15</sup> I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. <sup>16</sup> Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

A highly qualified pastoral candidate was trying to impress a skeptical search committee. To do so, he described his extensive educational background, showed an impressive portfolio of sermons and writings, and produced a lengthy list of glowing recommendations from seminary professors, former parishioners, and fellow

pastors. Still struggling to get a positive response, the candidate asked the search committee to accompany him to a nearby pond, where he proceeded to walk on the water. “Humph,” grumbled an elder. “So, I see you can’t swim.”

Today’s readings tell the story of an enthusiastic answer of “yes” to the call for an opportunity to be of service; then another talks about serving one another in love; and finally, the importance of the example of Jesus to serve humbly.

First, let’s look at Isaiah’s call story. Isaiah’s call story is a little different than other prophets. Some prophets argued with God over being called into the Lord’s service. They would argue strenuously with God. I can’t be your prophet or servant Lord! Choose anyone but me! I’m just a kid. I’m not this or that! Don’t choose me! Any number of excuses were foisted up to God. Heck, Jonah ran away when God called him. But Isaiah was different. His response was unusual. There was no arguing or running away. Instead, you have Isaiah shouting out, “Here am I! Send me!” You can feel the energy fly off the page. You get the feeling Isaiah would push someone out of the way to be first to answer the call of the Lord. That’s enthusiasm. Such a commitment to God, and God alone; nothing would stand in Isaiah’s way. Nothing.

Isaiah's enthusiasm is infectious, even hearing it thousands of years after his death.

I love that enthusiasm. He is all in. He doesn't mull it over. He doesn't even pray about it. He just says, Send me! I'm not encouraging not praying of course, I'm just illustrating how quick and joyful his response was. The Lord loves a cheerful giver, as the apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9:7. The Lord also loves a cheerful giver of their time and energy to God's call.

And then we have the story of Jesus on the night before he was executed washing the feet of his followers. Jesus doesn't tell the disciples what to do, to be of service, but instead, he shows them. He humbles himself and washes their feet. "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you," and then later, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

Here is the Son of Man, the Son of God, kneeling before his followers to wash their feet to show them the importance of being of service and not being the one in charge all the time. He showed humility. Even though he was God the Son, he showed them how critical it was for them to serve others. The apostles were called to be messengers of the gospel and servants of the Lord. The Lord served his followers. The Son of Man called them, and us, to serve as well.

And how will we do this service of our neighbors? Our church? Strangers? Friends and family? How are we to serve? With agape. Agape is the Greek word for love, and more specifically, it refers to Christian love. This is what Paul tells the Galatians in his letter to the church there in what is now Turkey.

Paul's letter to them was testy, for Paul saw some serious problems in that church, and this letter was a big tongue lashing and a lot of admonitions to them about how they were behaving. He reminds them that they are to use their freedom in Christ not for indulgence of the flesh and worldly things, but to "serve one another humbly in love." Paul tells the Galatian church to serve one another in agape. Agape and its variants are used 116 times in the New Testament. That's almost three times as many as *miseo*, the word for hate in Greek, which appears 40 times.

"You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love." It does not say serve one another humbly in like. We are called to serve in love. Jesus calls us to love one another. It's hard to love people who disagree with us, or who we don't like. We aren't called to like them; we are called to love them and be kind to them. To help them when they need help, to care for them when they need help.

The people who help lead our church here, the Ruling Elders and Deacons, are to enter their office officially today when they are installed and ordained. They answered the call. Many of you have been called too over the course of your life to serve this church, or your country, or an employer, or a service position to help other people, or businesses, or organizations. Perhaps now you are being called to serve on one of the committees in church, whether Christian Education, or Finance, or Building and Grounds, or Personnel, or Music and Worship, or Mission and Stewardship. Perhaps you have a skill or experience that would help on one of these committees. Or maybe you are interested in what they do. Ask me. Ask any of the elders. Go to a meeting. Check it out. Maybe you'll want to get involved. You never know unless you try! You don't need to be an elder or deacon to serve on a committee.

Perhaps you're retired, and maybe you're not as in good of shape as you once were, and can't serve on a committee or as a deacon or elder here. But you can still do service. Because you may be older and having some physical problems, doesn't get you off the hook of service. You can make phone calls to people who can't get out anymore, or who you know are sick. You can still pray for others. You can also write

out your faith story to give to your children and grandchildren. You can write this out for them as to why you believe in Christ, and why you go to church, and why you are a Christian. This is tremendous service work. You can write how Christ has entered into your heart and changed you and made your life more fulfilling and brought it meaning. Perhaps that might be your service now. And if you do this, really reflect on that question. Why do I believe in Christ? What does my faith mean to me? I'd encourage you to not make it a church resume, such as, in 1966 I attended First Presbyterian in Alton, Illinois, and the preacher was great there. Or I went to Mountain Presbyterian in Colorado and the preacher there wasn't that good. That doesn't tell us too much. While it's interesting and an important fact, that's not what I'm getting at. It's the reasoning and the why behind your faith. Why do I believe these things? Why am I here?

If you are a Christian, you are inherently called to serve God and others. As Christians we are called to serve the Lord and each other. One of the great themes of the Reformed tradition, of which the Presbyterian Church is a part, is, "The election of the people of God for service as well as for salvation."<sup>1</sup> We are called to serve. We are elected and chosen by God for service as well as for salvation. Yes it is by grace alone that we are saved by God, as Protestants we do not believe in

earning our way to salvation; through works we cannot earn our way to heaven. But as an expression of gratitude and as part of our missionary work, we serve and are an example of Christ's love to those who do not have a faith life. Through our works we show the love we have in our hearts which come from the love of God, and we express our love of God and appreciation. Let us pray now for an intensification of the service of this church, may it grow in faith and numbers for your glory alone and fill us with a spirit of service in this congregation that shines like a light through the clay jars that we are Lord. Amen.