

## God's Stewards: Served and Serving

5<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Epiphany – PWAP #2 – 02/09/25

Mt. Calvary Luth. Church

Text(s): John 13:3-5, 12-17; Phil. 2:1-8 Pastor Keith Besel

Jn. 13:14-15, [Jesus says to His disciples,] “<sup>14</sup> **If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.** <sup>15</sup> **For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.**”

### **Introduction**

✘ This morning, we continue this year's *People With A Purpose* journey by looking at another foundational, yet often overlooked – maybe even unpopular, principle that God teaches us in the Bible. It's a principle that Jesus both models for us and then points out directly that we “should do” as His Christian stewards.

➔ As with each principle we consider, there is one thing in common. Before we have any chance of living according to God's expectation for us; before we can ever be faithful in our stewardship before God, we must believe in and acknowledge God's transformative work in our lives that gives us the desire in our converted hearts, minds and souls to actually want to live according to God's will.

✘ So, today's principle is this: “God's stewards are served and serving.” So before we can serve others in God's love and name, we need to believe in, see and embrace the fact that He has first served us in mighty and miraculous ways.

### **I. Christ is the perfect, humble Suffering Servant**

✘ To most people in this world, our core nature says that we would much rather be served than be the one who is serving. It's just part of our basic sin-filed and self-centered nature. We think of “servants” as those who are lower in both status and worth in society, and “masters” as having more status and importance. Even more, if we're honest, it just feels nicer to receive attention and admiration, while we think of it as demoralizing and humiliating to be the one that is giving attention and praise to someone else.

➔ And this fundamental mindset is taught to us early on in our families, among our friends, in school, at work and pretty much everywhere else.

✘ Yet, Holy Scripture turns all of that on its head, teaching us that the opposite is true. For example, 1 John 4:19 wants us to see that understanding the concept of love correctly is the key to all of this. It says, “We love because [God] first loved us.”

➔ This Friday is Valentine's Day; a day supposedly centered on “love”, though half of the people are thinking, “I'll find out how much he/she loves me depending on what I get.” While the other half is thinking, “The only way I can show how much I love him/her is by giving something over the top.” This ends up teaching us that love is all about things and emotions.

➔ But you see, God's love isn't an emotion or feeling, but rather it is a good or positive action done to truly benefit another. We know this is true based on Scripture verses like John 3:16, “God so loved the world, that He gave ...” In fact, 1 John 4:9-10 shows that God's understanding of true love is that of putting the other person's true needs before our own. It says, “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the [substitutionary sacrifice] for our sins.”

- ✘ That explains what is behind this stewardship principle we're looking at today, that although God is almighty, His very nature is shown to us as a humble servant; as the perfect, sacrificial servant.
  - ➔ You and I see this most profoundly in the way that Jesus led His entire life in service to others; to you and to me. That's why He was born. He healed countless sick, drove out demons from people, raised the dead, preached repentance and salvation, and willingly suffered and died on a cross.
- ✘ And all of that from the Second Person of the Trinity. He's God! He didn't need to be coerced, bribed, or prodded into setting aside His place in heaven; His power; and all of His rights and privileges as God. And yet He willingly became the Suffering Servant. When He took on human flesh, He knew He would suffer humiliation, torture, and death to atone for the sins of an entire undeserving world, including us.
  - ➔ I know it pokes at our ego, but God doesn't need us. He didn't even need to create us. He didn't need to save us. Our existence doesn't add any value to the Triune God. He's perfect before us, and without us. Nevertheless, in His love, God chose to bless us with His life; His love, and His service toward us. You see, He created us; He loves us; He serves us so that we can benefit from and experience who He is and all that He has for us. He created us so that we can be served in love, and then so that we can have the same joy of serving others in His love.
- ✘ That's the encouragement we heard from St. Paul in our Epistle Reading: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:5–8).

## II. We express God's gift of faith in being a servant

- ✘ Being a servant, having the heart or attitude of a humble, loving servant – this is what it means, according to Paul, to "have [the] mind among" us, "which is [ours] in Christ Jesus"; this is the expression of Christian faith. Yes, humble, loving service is one of the clear marks of Christian stewardship.
  - ➔ The idea is that following Jesus' lead; looking not only to my own interests but finding true joy in looking to the needs and the interests of someone else before myself, and then acting on that love and concern to benefit those people over myself – this is what it means to be a steward of God.
- ✘ There are several places in the New Testament where Jesus Himself makes it clear how He feels about His believers having a servant heart. He even said that greatness in the kingdom of God is measured in terms of service.
  - ➔ For example, in Matthew 20:26-28, while Jesus was walking with His disciples, He responded to the selfish request that James and John's mother made, asking that her sons would sit at Jesus' right and left hand in His kingdom. He said, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."
  - ➔ And it was later, on the night of Jesus' arrest that we have the example of Jesus washing His disciples' feet in our Gospel Reading and then saying, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (Jn. 13:14–15)
- ✘ But let's be crystal clear, folks. The Christian life; our life as God's stewards, is not something we do because that's the only way that we can gain points or favor with God. There is nothing

we can do to deserve God's favor. But we live for God in serving others, because that's the new nature God has created within us through Jesus' blood on the cross.

→ Our love and our motives have been transformed so that now it is our privilege and honor to be servants. We serve because now we truly love God and we love others as He has taught us to love and serve them.

✘ Think of it this way: Before our conversion we, in our sinful nature, viewed the world as nothing more than a big department store made for our own pleasure. The time, talents, and treasure that God gave to us we viewed them as things that we both earned and deserved – just to get us whatever we wanted.

→ But now that Jesus has drowned that self-centered nature in our baptism and raised us to be with Himself as a redeemed child of God, we view our lives as Paul did when he told the Christians in Ephesus in Acts 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

✘ So, just in case you haven't noticed yet, this world's ways are not God's ways. For the most part, this world's primary way of life is to get us all to think, "What's in it for me?"

→ That permeates every nook and cranny of our culture. It dictates the academic world in our public and state-run schools. It motivates the business models of most companies and corporations. And it influences the majority of our political world – on the right, left and in between. That is why it seems so normal to so many to ignore the best interests and needs of others, because that's the way of our sinful nature as well.

✘ Yet living in the love and grace of Jesus; understanding that Jesus has set you free from the condemnation your sinful nature deserves, and all because of His undeserved and immeasurable love for you – this sets you free now to love and to serve – not by coercion or force, but because doing so is now what you want to do; because that is now the new nature that you received when you were Baptized into the Triune name of God.

→ You see, God hasn't only gifted us with His Spirit that creates and sustains us in our saving faith, but He has given each us a unique variety of resources, intelligence, and abilities, along with a countless number of ways to use those gifts in serving others; in serving His church; and in serving this world all around us.

### **III. We use all with which God blesses us to serve**

✘ But don't forget what God taught us last week. While we are no longer citizens of this world, but of heaven since our baptism, we still live every day in this world! So it's crucial that we stay intimately connected to the one who has purchased and won us with His holy precious blood, because our old nature and the world's ways are still eager to entice and deceive us into turning back away from Jesus.

→ So, it's important to live in God's Word; to stay connected to our fellow believers in His Church and to be fed and strengthened weekly by Christ's body and blood in Holy Communion so that we constantly develop and practice the habit of being good stewards of our time, our talents, and all of our God-given resources.

→ Paul says in Colossians 3:23-24, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ." "Whatever you do" means everything we have and everything we do is now to be done in ways that bring honor to God and bless our neighbors in all of life.

✘ Jesus gave His entire life to rescue us from hell, so why wouldn't we joyfully give our entire lives now to live for Him in gratitude?

→ 1 Pet. 4:10–11, gives us good direction: “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies – in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ...”

✘ God loves you; each one of you individually, and all of you as His *People with a Purpose*. His love is obvious in the way that Jesus laid down His life in humble service to you; so that you can now enjoy, experience, and benefit from His love today and forever. This is His service to you.

→ But He wants His love to spread and so it is also His purpose; His plan that you would be blessed when you love Him in return by serving others. You see, He wants you to have the same joy that He has had in serving you. As Matthew 25:34 says, the day will come when you hear Jesus say, “Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” To Him be the glory in all that we think, say and do in His name. Amen.