

The Heart of a Servant
Colossians 3:12-17 and Philipians 2:5-8
September 22, 2019

During the month of September, I am doing a sermon series based on our new mission statement and the 5 principles to accomplish it in preparation for the arrival of our new pastor, Rev. Dr. Craig Lindsey. These are listed on the sermon page of your bulletin. Let's take a look at it together. A mission statement tells why we exist as a church. It expresses our goals as a church.

Here it is:

VPC's Mission Statement: To make Christ known through reconciliation while communicating respect and love to all people.

The principles to accomplish this are:

- Worship that glorifies God
- Growing in our faith in love, hope and the peace of Christ
- Caring for the children of God
- Reaching out to the community and the world
- Seeking an attitude of servant-hood

I have chosen Colossian 3 to encompass our mission statement and the 5 principles. We have been using this same passage every week. Then I add another scripture passage that gives the theme for the day.

Three weeks ago, we looked at the last part of our mission statement: communicating respect and love to all people. I couched it in one word: hospitality. Last Sunday, I looked at principle #1: Worship that glorifies God.

This morning, we will look principle #5: Seeking an attitude of servant-hood. I have two stories that happened in the news recently that illustrate servant-hood. I will begin with one of the stories and end with the other.

I don't watch "America's Got Talent," but while online the other day, I happened to see a headline that said, "The Winner of America's Got Talent is...." I had to click on to find out the winner. I was curious enough to see what America likes, so I clicked on it.

The winner was a young man named Kodi Lee. I didn't know what Kodi Lee's talent was, so I searched for his first audition and watched it. His mother led him out on stage as he carried a white cane. It was obvious he was blind.

The judges began to ask Kodi questions. Again, it was obvious that something was different, a bit off. It took Kodi about 5 seconds before he answered any question. And when he did, his answer was just a few words. His answers came out very strange...sort of a sing-song voice.

The TV camera kept showing the faces of the judges as they tried to talk to Kodi. You could tell they were trying very hard to show respect. They were trying to be kind and gentle with him. Yet they were thinking, "What kind of train wreck is this going to be?" They were putting on a brave face.

Finally one of the judges turned to the mother and said, "Tell us about Kodi." "He is blind and autistic," she said. The camera went back on Kodi who was rocking forward and backwards over and over again. She said when Kodi discovered music it saved his life.

The judges asked Kodi what he was going to do today, and after about 5 seconds he said in a sing-song voice, "Sing for you." His mother led him over to the piano, got him seated, showed him where the microphone was. She then kneeled down to his level so she was face to face with him, told him there were cameras on him, and asked if he was ready. He was.

There was silence as Kodi tested the mic, found where his fingers were to go on the piano. He began to play. It was nice. But then he began to sing. He had the most beautiful voice. The camera switched to the judges. Simon Cowell's eyes were bugging out of his face. Another judge's jaw had dropped open. Another judge began to cry. No one expected this from Kodi.

"Communicate respect and love to all people" our mission says because all of us are made in the image of God, and all of us have a special gift. None of us is more important than another. We are all on the same level. Our example? The one we follow....Jesus Christ.

The Philippians passage explains what Jesus had to do to come be with us here on earth. Just as Kodi's mom knelt down before Kodi so she was at his level, Jesus came to be on our level. Just as Kodi's mom was face to face with her son, Jesus came to be face to face with us to show us God.

These are the words the scripture passage uses to describe what Jesus did to come down to our level...

Made himself nothing or emptied himself

Became a servant

Humbled himself

....so we might know who God is.

By emptying himself, Jesus stripped himself of his glory and divine rights. He humbled himself and became a servant. Jesus who was on the same level as God, in fact was God, came down to be on the same level with us. He looked like an ordinary, very common, nondescript human being. He emptied himself. That's humility.

Not only does this passage say what Jesus did, it also includes Jesus' thoughts about the whole thing. Jesus who was the very nature of God "did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage." He came to serve, not take advantage of us. And the passage says we are to have the same mindset as Jesus.

I did not include verse 4 of the Philippians passage. I wish I did because it says, "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also the interests of others....have the same mindset as Jesus Christ."

We are to seek an attitude of servant-hood and humility. We are to kneel down and be level with others. Our Colossians passage gives practical ways on how to be that kind of servant:

Verse 12 – "clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

Verse 13 – forgive one another

Verse 14 – put on love

Verse 15 – let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.

Verse 16 – have gratitude in your hearts

Seek an attitude of servant-hood.

The Christian life is not about you. It is about having the mind of Christ. Emptying ourselves, humbling ourselves, serving others and putting them first. Coming down to the level of the person we are serving. Seeking an attitude of servant hood in all that we do.

Someone once asked Albert Schweitzer to name the greatest person alive in the world at that moment. The good doctor, whom many would have named as deserving the honor, replied quietly: "The greatest person alive in the world at this moment is some unknown individual in some obscure place who, at this hour, has gone *in love* to be with another person in need."

Seeking an attitude of servant-hood.

I came across this story about a 3 year-old boy in Massachusetts named Quinn who developed a compromised immune system due to treatment on a cancerous brain stem tumor. He has to stay in his house at all times, and the only contact he has with the outside world is the front window of his home.

For you see, people are stopping by that window. It began with his two uncles having a water balloon fight outside the window to entertain Quinn. Then a family friend arrived with a guitar and sang to him. This was followed by a couple of police officers who roared up on their motorcycles and sounded their sirens.

And then it got big. Police and fire departments from neighboring towns came with lights flashing. People are coming from miles around to sing, dance, perform card tricks, walk on their hands all to boost Quinn's spirits. Even a group of cyclists on a 342 mile bike trip took a detour to wave at him. That picture made the news.

All those people having an attitude of servant-hood. It's really quite simple.

Servant-hood is letting the person who gets to the grocery checkout lane the same time you do, and you let them go first.

Servant-hood is checking in on your lonely or ailing neighbor.

Servant-hood is driving someone to their doctor's appointment.

Servant-hood is being generous with material things.

Servant-hood is letting another person speak even though you disagree with them.

Servant-hood is thinking the best of others, forgiving them when they don't know what they're doing.

Servant-hood is praying for our "enemies," and those who "persecute" us (see Matthew 5).

Servant-hood is trying being a peacemaker.

Servant hood is being compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient with others.

I end with the other story that happened in the news a couple of weeks ago. Now, this story involves President Trump and is not meant to be political. I share it because it is a great example that teaches how _____ to be a servant.

President Trump had sent a tweet to a man named Jonathan Karl, who was an ABC News reporter. Trump was upset by how this reporter was reporting Hurricane Dorian and the government response. So President Trump said in the tweet "Such a phony hurricane report by lightweight reporter Jonathan Carl."

Well, the tweet did go to a Jonathan Karl, but it was the wrong Jonathan Karl. Instead it went to a Southern Baptist pastor and Iraq War veteran named Jonathan Carl in Kentucky. When Pastor Jonathan Carl received the tweet from the President, he laughed out loud marveling that he had the attention of the President.

But his laughter soon turned into concern. Because now, Pastor Jonathan Carl was a Twitter target, and began to receive a barrage of tweets. Jonathan said they turned into words of hate.

A week later, Jonathan published an open letter to Trump that has gone viral. I am going to read you parts of this letter because it teaches us how to have a servant heart. And note that it sounds a lot like the passage in Colossians.

Dear Mr. President,

Last week you tweeted an insult my way. It was an accidental mis-tweet of course, I'm just an ordinary citizen (Jonathan Carl) and not worthy of POTUS attention like ABC News reporter Jonathan Karl. Nonetheless your drive-by tweet quickly brought a spectrum of intense vitriol and hatred my way.

In light of the lessons of my wounds I thought I would share a few personal thoughts...

Be Slow to Tweet. *It is wonderful that you want to communicate frequently with your constituency and the world. Exercise self-control and be more patient and selective with your correspondence.... You can make Twitter a better place if you choose a platform of love instead of hate. As everyone's mother used to say, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't tweet anything at all."*

Apologize more. *Everyone makes mistakes. All of us have regrets about past things we've said and wish we could change. When you mess up, please learn to say you are sorry and admit you were wrong. Even to ordinary folk like me. Such humility goes a long way.*

Be humble. *You called an experienced reporter a "lightweight." Let's be honest, you are a lightweight too. We all are. God is the only heavyweight who knows it all and gets it right all the time. That should keep things in perspective for all of us. You are not the ultimate Commander-In-Chief. May we all be reminded of our national motto, "In God We Trust" and be more faithful to Him...*

Choose kindness. *Goodness speaks much louder and more effectively than harsh words. Gentleness builds up instead of tearing down. The world is hateful enough. Meekness is not a weakness, but a strength. The world needs more light and hope. My prayer is that you grow into a bright beacon of joy and peace in a traumatized universe.*

Sincerely,

Jonathan Carl, a lightweight husband, father, pastor....

May we all be a beacon of joy and peace as we seek an attitude of servant-hood in all that we do. Amen.