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Easter 2 A, April 16, 2023

“Jesus – Our Joy - Being Like Jesus”

Read: Matthew 20: 20 – 28/ Memorize Matt. 20: 26 - 27

St. Augustine wrote: “So deep has human pride sunk us that only divine humility can raise us.” This point was not lost on St. Martin of Tours, the famous soldier-saint of France. The story goes that one day, he was praying and a figure, robed like a king with a jeweled crown and gold-embroidered shoes, appeared to him. The voice said to him, “Martin, recognize him whom you see. I am Christ. I am about to descend to the earth and I am showing myself to you first.”

A couple of minutes later, the voice went on: “Why do you hesitate, Martin, to believe me, I am Christ.” Martin replied: “The Lord Jesus did not foretell that he would come in purple and crowned in gold. I will not believe that Christ has come unless I see Him in the dress and in the form in which He suffered.” At that point the figure disappeared and Martin realized it was a temptation of the devil.

In Matthew 20, we see Jesus being confronted with a problem. The mother of the sons of Zebedee, comes to Him, kneels before Him and asks Him to do a favor for her. Jesus asks what she wants. She asks that her sons be given the places of honor in the new kingdom.

Mom and boys thought this kingdom was going to be on earth. I’m uncertain if they thought rebellion, but they did think that there was power to be possessed and they wanted to be first in line. This is not a new temptation for people. In fact, it’s pretty much the norm. People aspire to power. They don’t want to be the one serving. They want to be the one being served.

It plays into the fact that humility is not held in high regard. Just think if St. Martin had fallen for that temptation. Unfortunately, we, at this point, seem to see that it is lost on Jesus’ disciples, all of whom want the top spots.

Jesus tells mom and the boys He is not in a position to grant their request. The Gospel tells us is that the other ten were indignant at being beaten to the punch. They all kinda, sorta missed the point. Jesus is heading to Jerusalem to die and they are arguing about who gets to be first in the Kingdom.

Power is an incredible temptation. We hear stories all the time about how power can corrupt. They do devious things to attain it and to hold on to it. You may often find yourself in the bind of being caught in a power struggle between those wanting to go up and those fearing going down. It doesn't make for a good place to work, live or thrive.

Jesus takes this opportunity to explain something really important to all His disciples. He didn't call them to be power brokers. His plan was that they would become more like Him. To accomplish that plan, He compares the rulers and authorities of the present time, which is pretty familiar to us, to what they should be like.

Then He gets down to the nitty gritty. How do you become great in the Kingdom of God? Serve. Serve with humility. When you do that, you'll become like Jesus. Jesus wants that to be our joy. He is hoping to create a whole people who hold servanthood in high repute and respect.

When you ask little kids who they want to be like, they will often say their mommy and daddy. To a child, a parent is their best example. When a child sees a parent being caring, kind and humble, they learn that these are valuable gifts. Unfortunately, if power is the thing that moves you in life, you are not likely to have a very joyful life.

Oftentimes, power is achieved by putting others down.

It's not that you shouldn't strive. Jesus wants you to strive to be like Him. He came and humbled Himself to be a servant. He brought healing, mercy and loving acceptance. In their sins He offered them mercy, and in death He offered them hope.

That's the Jesus we worship and that's the Jesus as His followers, we want to be like. We've all had the experience of dealing with people who might be upset, angry and frustrated. When we acknowledge those things and help them, treating them with care and respect, it often changes their attitude, rather than when we yell back at them. As we are reminded in Proverbs 15: 1, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

I certainly hope that you find joy in serving at church. I know it is my joy to serve with you in the many things we seek to accomplish. As each of you participate in worship ministries and hospitality you help to get the message out to others about Jesus. When we come together to serve one another I hope you find joy in it. It is the opportunity to serve Jesus by serving others.

But that is not the only service that we render. In fact, I hope that what we do here at church is just a small smidgen of how we serve. If we want to serve like Jesus, we want to look at how Jesus served. He went out into the community. He paid attention to what was happening around Him and interceded when there was need. He showed kindness

and mercy to those considered “sinners” by the very religious, who thought they were unworthy of any kindness.

We are called to serve beyond the church. Think about where you live and the interactions you have with people. What opportunities have they presented to you to serve. Here’s a smidgen of the things I hear. Someone was telling about going to help with a chicken bbq in their community. Another person sits on a board of a non-profit agency, trying to solve problems in our community. Others go out and shovel a neighbor’s driveway when it needs shoveling.

Some contribute their time, talents and treasures to organizations like CCIA, Family Promise, Habitat and the untold numbers of other organizations in our community that help people. These are all opportunities to serve. When we’re serving, we have a special resource to call upon to help us serve, and more importantly make an impact for Jesus. We have our Christian faith.

We want to have the same attitude as Jesus did: “I’ve come to serve rather than be served.” In that service we get the opportunity to meet people and share with the love of Jesus. We get to talk about Jesus. Roxann tells the story of going through Palm Sunday, the crucifixion and the Easter story with one of the preschool classes. The kids were all joyful about Jesus rising from the dead. One of the girls said, “I’m going to go home and tell my mommy.”

We want to be ready when people ask why we serve joyfully to say it’s because of Jesus’ love. We want to be prepared for that so that we don’t stumble on it or sound prideful about it. He came and died for us so that we may live for others. When we learn to say that in a loving way it has tremendous impact.

Our mission field includes the people we work with, those we work for and the people we serve in them. In a time when the church was teaching that to serve as a minister or a priest was the highest possible service, Luther comes along and says something different. Whenever a person serves Jesus joyfully in their vocation, whatever that vocation might be, they are ministering.

The garbage collector, doing his job joyfully, caringly, is just as important as the priest. The barrel maker, who uses his skill joyfully to make the best possible barrel so that others will have their brews is ministering to people. When you serve like Jesus that will give you great joy and impact others

How do you decide where to serve? The same way I hope you make any other decision, by prayer. Where is God leading you to serve? How has He equipped you to serve? How much are you willing to invest in it? God has given you time, talents and treasure to use.

These are the gifts you bring to serve. They represent you but they also represent Jesus, as you follow Him. I pray that God will help you to find the ways in which He wants you to serve.

I imagine Jesus was very, very sad when Zebedee's mom came to ask Him about the top places. He had been walking with the disciples for three years and now they wanted to know about who could be in charge. I suspect that the conversation in which everybody became indignant happened that night and finally Jesus had to step in. He said, "Wanting to be a leader is fine, but leadership in my Kingdom is defined by servanthood. Whoever is the best servant is also the best leader."

They really should have known that. All they had to do was look at how Jesus had served to know that He specialized in menial tasks that everyone avoided. He tended to children, fixed breakfast and served lepers. Nothing was beneath Him because He came to serve. Certainly, that night when He washed feet should have made that all clear.

Ultimately, His greatest service came on a cross. He became "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." When He appeared to them on Easter morning; showed the nail prints in His hands and His side, these were the symbols of sacrificial love.

Jesus' life is a model of progressive humility: Jesus became a man, a servant and a sacrifice. Jesus reminds us that those who serve are honored. He wants us to have the attitude. Paul reminds us of it in Philippians 2: 8, "He humbled Himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross." When we joyfully humble ourselves to serve we are being just like Jesus.

Count me in:

Find a way to serve with joyful humility.