

The St. John's Pulpit

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SERVING OTHERS: INCARNATING YOUR RELATIONAL VISION

Micah 6:6-8; Matthew 25:31-40; James 2:14-18

Season of Kingdومتide, October 23, 2016
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Have you ever wondered why it feels good and seems right to serve others? Do you wish the Golden Rule was a platinum practice for everyone? Consider three ideas with me today.

First, It Feels Good and Seems Right to Serve Others

..... Because the Bible Teaches You to Do So.

You expect to hear that message from a pulpit. 'It feels good and seems right to serve others because the Bible says you should do so.' The St. John's Pulpit affirms that answer! In fact, you should serve others because the Bible says so AND because Jesus did so.

Today, three familiar Bible passages have been read supporting this message:

In Micah 6, the Lord requires, "...do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God."

In Jesus' parable, he says, "...as you did it unto ONE of the least of these, you did it to me."

In James' letter, we read, "...faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead."

Each one of these Bible passages teaches you to serve others; this is one way of pleasing God.

However, there is a **SECOND** reason why it feels good and seems right to serve others:

...Because Serving Others Incarnates Your Experience of a Relationship with God.

In a truck stop diner, during a busy holiday season, a waitress approached a table with an issue she had seen many times. A five-year old boy, who had been confined in the back seat, for a few hours on the interstate, wanted to be anywhere except in his chair. His father seemed distraught. She thought of her grandson. So, the waitress smiled at the dad as she focused on the boy. Seeking to be grandmotherly, she asked, "What do you want to eat, little Mr.?" He looked at the father and then shouted as if he were declaring his independence: "Hamburger, French fries and a milkshake." Dad corrected the order: "He will have roast beef, mashed potatoes and a glass of milk." The boy protested, "I'm not hungry." Nodding to the father, the wise and experienced waitress bent down beside the boy's chair and spoke softly; "Hey, how about I make your meal in a way that you will like? I will roast your hamburger so it looks like roast beef, give you French mashed potatoes and put your milk in a milkshake cup?" The boy settled a bit, looked at his dad and said, "She thinks I'm real."

Somewhere along the way, you opened your life to God, convinced that God relates with you in a loving way and makes you feel real; in a way that validates you – as you. This is why and this is how you are empowered to flesh-out or incarnate your experience of this relational loving God toward others. You love others because they bear the image of God. And, you are able to love others because you have embraced the image of God within you.

How many times do you decide to bless someone by serving them and then you come away with the blessing? Serving others incarnates your experience of a relationship with God. You have experienced The Living God as the Power of Love who makes you real. Therefore, you serve others by sharing the love and power of God that helps them become real.

It Feels Good and Seems Right to Serve Others

.....Because the Bible Teaches You to Do So and

.....Because Your Experience of a Relational God Cannot Allow Anything Else

And, **THIRD**, It Feels Good and Seems Right to Serve Others

.....Because This Connects You as Co-Laborers with The Living God.

Let me tell you a story I first heard when I was in High School. It is the story of a courageous knight who left the castle riding into distant lands to make a name for himself. He wanted to please the king. He was gone for two years. Then, one day, the watchman saw the knight returning across the fields and lowered the drawbridge. Once inside the castle yard, the king came out to greet the knight. The knight was exhausted, beaten and bloody. He fell off his horse at the feet of the king who asked, “Sir Knight, what has happened to you? Where have you been?” The knight answered, “O my king, I have been out attacking your enemies on the north side of the mountains.” The king responded, “I have no enemies on the north side of the mountains.” And, the knight explained, “You do now!”

Young adults and youth and children, I make a request of you today: Please, follow Jesus so closely that the only enemies you make are already fighting against God. When we read history, we see so many places where followers of Jesus have brought about peace. Yet, we also see many instances where people, in the name of religion and the Church, have caused pain, suffering, war, desolation, and annihilation. Sometimes, Christ’s Church has created enemies of God and sometimes Christ’s Church has been the enemy of God.

Young people, the middle-aged and wisdom-aged adults around you have served others in many ways and continue to do so. They are similar to many people in the Bible and most followers of Jesus throughout two-thousand years. Their relational vision of God guides them to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God. Their relational vision of God guides them to follow Jesus in feeding the hungry, giving clean water to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the poor, caring for the sick and visiting the prisoner. Their relational vision of God combines works with commitment so they live by Active Faith. Learn from us and improve upon us.

The prophet Micah challenges us to “do justice and love kindness – or mercy.” Justice and mercy are not always dance partners in perfect sync. For the prophet, ‘doing justice’ meant using power and resources to serve and never to manipulate. Doing justice requires identifying, exposing and correcting injustice wherever it is found. And, when you study the history of God’s people, you find that many knights have left the castle to do justice while forsaking kindness or mercy. God calls us to be about justice AND mercy. God calls us to be a both-and people in an either-or world.

In this season of spiritual renewal, I have been trying to teach you that Active Faith is lived both on the vertical dimension of nurturing a faithful relationship with God AND on the horizontal dimension of maturing in active service of others. How apropos for the dimensions of Active Faith to be in the shape of a cross! Our St. John’s Mission Statement is ‘Actively Faithful Faithfully Active.’ (Please say that aloud with me.) LET IT BE SO!