Mark 9:30-50

Date: Sunday, 13 June 2021

Scripture: Mark 9:30-50

Sermon: Serving Jesus

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Passage

Mark 9:30 They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, 31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise." 32 But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.

Mark 9:33 And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. 35 And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." 36 And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

Mark 9:38 John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." 39 But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. 40 For the one who is not against us is for us. 41 For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

Mark 9:42 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. 43 And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. 47 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 48 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' 49 For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

Transcript

A Life of Service

Growing up in the Shire, was not the easiest of experiences for me. I remember being one of three or four asians in my year. I was teased as well because my English wasn't up to scratch. It was a really difficult time for me, but I know that God used it to grow me. I think on it as a way that God has helped me see myself as different.

Have you ever been treated differently? Maybe you've been treated differently at home, at your workplace, with extended family members. To the point where you've lived differently from everyone around you?

Today, as we come to this passage, the theme of being different comes up. It's what Christians are to be compared to those who are not Christians. Being Christian means you are going to be different from your family, your friends, work colleagues and neighbours who aren't Christian. It's part of the deal when you become a Christian, you're different.

One of the ways that you, as a Christian, is going to be different is the way you serve. The way you serve and that's what we're going to talk about today. I just love the encounter that Jesus has with his disciples, they're on their way to Jerusalem now, and he catches them talking amongst themselves, "What were you discussing

on the way?" And what do the disciples do? They're quiet because why? They had been discussing who was greatest. I wonder what Jesus would have felt at that point. Because really the disciples have missed the point. I hope that we don't miss this one point today.

Following Jesus is not about being the greatest. It is about being the least. If you are a Christian, if you say that you follow Jesus, let me be very clear, your life is about service now. Service to one another here at church. Serving your loved ones, serving your enemies, serving Jesus.

Just as Mother Teresa once said,

In doing your best (to serve) others for free, a lot of eyebrows will raise and sneers will curve many a - faces. But in the end those incredulous to what you put up with to help, no longer matter. It's not between you and those snobs, but with whom you have given your hand to lift, and of course to God who Is watching and noting it in your book.

Following Jesus is a life of service. It's not about being the greatest. It's about being the lowest, it's about being humble and serving others.

So we're going to look at two questions today. How do we serve others? And why are we to serve others? Those are the two questions that we are going to ask.

How Do We Serve Others?

So let's have a look at the first of these questions, how do we serve others? I'm going to spend most of my time here because I want to be super practical today. This passage that Alison read out to us this morning shows us how we are to serve. There's three ways we are to serve.

Serving Everyone

Firstly, what we see is that we are to serve everyone from the greatest to the lowest. Have a look with me at the passage.

But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." And he took a child

and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me." Mark 9:34–37 (ESV)

I hope that we see how clear Jesus is. We are to serve everyone. We are to consider ourselves as last. And to illustrate Jesus brings a child to show that we are to include even the lowest.

In today's Chinese culture, did you know that parents can often live for their children? They will spend all their time, their resources, and their money, in order to raise their children. Why? Because for Chinese people, their children can either be their joy or their shame. In fact, I've seen families, where parents will focus on their children to the detriment of their own marriage. And once the children leave home, get married and have their own children, the parents don't know what to do as empty nesters. Children can be held in such high esteem in Chinese culture. To the point that parents idolise them.

But that's not the picture we should see here in this passage. In fact, for a 1st century person hearing Jesus' words, they would have understood what he meant when he said to receive a child. They would have understood that a child represented the lowest order in the social scale. Why? Because a child is completely dependent on those around them. They are under the care and authority of other people. Because they are little, they are unimportant. They are to be considered last.

And so, for Jesus' disciples, listening to him, as he draws a child in amongst their presence would have been really shocking. Because they are to be servants even of children. They are to serve even the lowest in their midst. To serve anyone and everyone, no matter their status.

Do you serve like that? Do you seek to serve everyone? Rachel and I were talking and reflecting on this passage earlier in the week as we went out for a meal, and she was reminded of the book of James. James speaks to the church and warns them not to practice favouritism. That they were not to treat the rich any differently from the poor. Because apparently, they were treating the rich as better. They would give the rich the best seat in the house presumably up the front. When they would ask the poor to sit elsewhere, at the back.

Do we serve like that? Where we treat people who are more similar to us better than those who are different to us? I once heard a retired minister and his wife

share with me how they were serving at a church in the lower north shore. The wife was explaining to me how their church had CEOs and their families in the church. She was really proud of that fact. And she went on to share an experience of a single mother coming into the church, and she said rather matter of factly that they had asked her to leave because she "didn't fit in." I was furious. Absolutely furious. And I would be furious if I found out that this church did the same. Jesus calls us to serve everyone. Doesn't he? In fact he even says that, have a look!

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. For the one who is not against us is for us. For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward. Mark 9:38–41 (ESV)

It sounds like this man that John is speaking about is not one of the disciples. He's not one of their own. But Jesus tells us that there are to be no cliques. Even if someone is not one of our own, no matter their background, no matter their heritage, no matter their age, no matter if they can't speak English well. We are to treat everyone the same. We are to serve everyone. That's the first way we are to serve

By Building Them Up

The second way we are to serve others is by building them up. What do I mean by that? Have a look with me at the passage,

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. Mark 9:42 (ESV)

One of the ways that we are to help serve others is by not causing others to sin. One of the dangerous ways we can treat others is by being a stumbling block to them. There are ways that we can cause real harm to other people. Maybe we don't think that's possible. I'll give you an example. Would it be loving if I found out that one of our members was struggling with an alcohol addiction, and I decided to wave alcohol around that person? Or would it be loving if I decided to gossip about one of you to the rest of the church?

Jesus warns us that we are to serve others not by tearing other people down. That we are to be careful in the way that we treat another person's faith. We are not to

make a shipwreck of their faith. We are to be really careful how we treat others. I think that's why Jesus uses a child as an example. You know when you speak to a child harshly at the wrong time, they can carry it with them for the rest of their lives.

Jesus wants us to serve other people, by building them up. We want to help them in their faith. Paul himself says that we are to encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5). The writer to the Hebrews encourages us by saying that since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us run the race that is set out before us (Hebrews 12). There are Christians who have gone before us and have died, and they are cheering us on.

I love a good competition. On Wednesday, there was the State of Origin, where NSW won against Queensland 50-6. It was good to see. But you know what would have been even better? If it wasn't a competition, but it was teamwork on both sides, both sides helping one another. I'm not sure how that would work. But I recently heard from a parent about their child playing soccer. Do you know what the parents of the kids do? Encourage the kids. Even when the scoreline is like 20-0. Because they know that they are trying their best.

So I want to take this time to say this, I want to say to each one of you that I am so encouraged by you. You're all different. I know that. But I am encouraged by each of you and the faith that you have in Jesus Christ. I'm encouraged by each one of you. And I pray that we would continue to seek to serve one another.

And I want to lay down a challenge today, who here can you encourage? Who here can you encourage with a word of encouragement rather than a word that tears down? Who here can you encourage with a deed of good work? Maybe someone here you know needs quality time. Do you know the five love languages by Gary Chapman? I think that they're helpful. Maybe an act of service (driving them somewhere), some quality time, a word of encouragement over the phone or on email, a gift (some flowers), or some physical touch like a high five, a fist bump or hug?

We are to build one another up.

With Everything We Have

Thirdly, we are to serve with everything we have. And I want to show you, have a look with me,

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. Mark 9:43–45 (ESV)

Jesus is clear about the fact that we are to not sin. He talks metaphorically about our body parts. We are not to physically amputate them. But what Jesus is saying is that we're to be really clear about what we are to use our body parts for. We are to use our body parts to serve Jesus. We are to use our body parts to serve other people.

Our lives. Our whole lives are to be used in the service of other people. It's a picture that Mark wants to draw out when he talks about fire and salt in verse 49 and 50. It appears that Mark is alluding to Leviticus 2 where grain offerings were seasoned with salt before being offered as a sacrifice to God. Mark is illustrating the true sacrificial nature of our lives. Our talents, our money, our time, our resources. And in the New Testament, that theme continues. Paul the Apostle says that we are to be living sacrifices. I love that picture. In the Old Testament, the priests would make sacrifices in the temple. They'd get a lamb on the altar and sacrifice it to God. The only problem is that once a sacrifice was sacrificed, that was it. That's not you.

You are a living sacrifice. You give yourself up to God everyday. You use your flower skills to make flowers. You use your morning tea skills. You use your jam skills. You use your talking and encouraging skills. You use your computer skills. You use your maintenance skills. You sacrifice. It hurts at times, it costs you at times, but you sacrifice to serve others. You honour God with what he has given you. And that's everything. Those children you have. He's given them to you. That money you got he's given it to you. That house you have, he's given it to you. That brain you've got, he's given to you.

But Justin, I don't have any gifts! Yes you do. You may not know it, ask someone who knows you well, I'm sure they could name at least three things. You may not be able to use those gifts here at church, but the church is bigger than Caringbah Presbyterian. Take John for example, he volunteers for the Mission to Seafarers. I commend him on that. I wouldn't want him to stop that because this church may not currently be involved. I commend him on it! Diane serves in missions overseas. I commend her on that! It's a wonderful ministry. God has given us gifts, not to hoard, not to bury, but to share, to serve the church.

But Justin, I can't get out of the house. Do you know, that the biggest way you can serve is to pray? I want to say that. Your prayers are so so important. I've been reading the book Margaret lent me, "Lord, Change Me." It's a great book, you need to read it. One of the chapters, the author talks about how she felt energised at a certain time in the morning. And she asked her friends if they had been praying. And they had in fact been praying at the very moment she felt more energy. Prayer works! Can I encourage you all, pray, pray, pray!

But I want to say, some of us here need to take a step back. Some of us here, are doing way too much. And you need to serve by not serving as much.

At the manse, as you know, at the back, there's some large trees that block our backyard neighbours from seeing into our house. It's been really good. But lately, I've been noticing that when I mow the lawn (yes, I mow the lawn) there's patches of grass that have gone yellow. In fact, it's dangerously close to becoming just dirt. Because the tree is so large no sun nor rain gets through and so the grass dies. I fear that for some of us here, we are serving because we feel we must. But have you ever considered that your serving prevents others here from serving? There could be a bible study leader, an accountant in our midst that is missing out on God's blessings because you are holding on too tight. You need to serve by letting go.

Why Are We Serve Others?

I'm going to end it here by talking very briefly about why we can serve others. During the week, Rachel shared a story about how a woman in the US was in a Starbucks drive through. And she was inspired to pay for the person behind her. Do you know what happened? The person behind her, then decided to pay for the person behind them. And so on. Do you know how long the chain went for? 378 people. 378 people decided that they would serve the person after them because the person in front decided to serve them.

How much more for us. For us who have had Jesus serve us. The reason why we can love others is because Jesus first loved us. Jesus served us by laying his life down for us that we might have eternal life. And if he's done that, we are free to pass that on to others. Only when we realise Christ's great love for us then we will serve everyone around us wholeheartedly building them up. What a God, what a saviour!