

FOLLOW INTO SERVICE

Philippians 2:5-8

Matthew 25:31-46

1/31/10

Jerry Shepard

In a scene in Lloyd Douglas's book, *The Robe*, Marcellus, the Roman centurion who had the robe of Jesus, becomes a Christian and tells his fiancée the story of Jesus. She responds, "*It's a beautiful story, Marcellus, but we don't have to do anything about it, do we? Let's leave it just where it is.*" "*That's just it, says Marcellus, "I cannot forget it. Because it happened, things can never be the same for me again."* Marcellus had encountered Jesus and his life could not go on as if nothing had happened.

The life of Jesus changed people. In Jesus people experienced the extraordinary love and power of God. People who had thought they were unacceptable to God and excluded from God's love, experienced God's forgiveness and love through Jesus.

Jesus' ministry was to the down and out. Jesus did not socialize with the rich and powerful, but with the poor, the powerless and ostracized people in society. Jesus reached out to lepers, to the blind, to the crippled, to prostitutes, to the mentally ill, to tax collectors for Rome and to those who were rejected by society. The good religious folk of the day criticized Jesus for hanging out with wrong kind of people. Jesus responded to the criticism, by saying that those who are sick are the ones who need a physician. In other words, "these people whose lives are such a mess are the ones that need me most." In his hometown synagogue Jesus declared, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery to the blind, to let the oppressed go free* (Luke 4:18)

Jesus came to earth to SERVE humanity. Our scripture in Philippians 2:5-8 said that, "*though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slavehe humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.*" Jesus the son of God left the comforts of heaven for the agony of the cross, in order to serve humanity, i.e., to reconcile humanity to God and to one another. On the night before his death, Jesus took a towel and basin of water and knelt at the dusty feet of each disciple, and washed their feet. Jesus acted like a slave and served his disciples. He then told them that he had set an example for them, to serve

one another.

Marcellus said his life could not be the same after meeting Jesus. One way a person's life is changed by meeting Jesus is that **one's life becomes a life of service**. If we are going to be followers of Jesus, we will follow him right into the places of THE suffering and forgotten in order to serve them.

Japanese social reformer, Kagawa wrote: *"God dwells among the lowliest of men. He sits on the dust heap among the prison convicts. With the juvenile delinquents He stands at the door, begging bread. He throngs with the beggars at the place of alms. He is among the sick. He stands in line with the unemployed in front of the free unemployment bureaus."* Can there be any doubt that Jesus is in Haiti through the relief workers, missionaries, and soldiers?

St. Francis of Assisi was the son of a wealthy cloth merchant. He had visions of Christ walking among the poor in his area while he lived in the lap of luxury. He couldn't continue to live that way so he left his life of comfort and privilege and went to serve the poor. Those who follow Jesus join him in helping those in need.

What we do doesn't have to be heroic. We can serve others in small, but significant ways. This week I saw Jan Bradshaw on the kitchen floor of a church member's home, who has been sick, scrubbing it with a little sponge and I recalled the memory of Jesus on his knees washing his disciples feet. In that same home I watched Sue Prete scrub tubs and toilets and John Bradshaw vacuuming carpet and bringing in groceries. Little acts of kindness for a precious child of God in need. On Wednesday nights church members like Alice Reynolds cooks food and Jay Reynolds and Linda Standau and others deliver meals to our elderly and sick members. With Soups On Us, you can make sandwiches, bake cookies, deliver a boxed meal to someone in need of a little help. William Wordsworth talks of *"the best portion of a good man's life, His little nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love."*

Gabriel Marcel says that AVAILABILITY is the surest sign of a well-developed soul. A person who is not all wrapped up in his or herself, but is available to help others, has a real understanding of the essence of the Christian faith. An openness to embrace the suffering and needs of others is a true mark of a Christian.

Service to others is what matters to God. According to Matthew 25, we are judged, not on our biblical knowledge nor on our church attendance, nor on our beliefs. We are judged by how we have responded to the those who are suffering. In the apocalyptic parable of the last judgment, the Son of Man separates people based on how they have cared for those

who suffer. To those on his right he will say, *“come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”*

My friends, we should look in the mirror and ask ourselves, “Am I available to people who are sick, to people who are poor, to people who are alone, to people who are in nursing homes, to people who are in prison? Or am I so wrapped up in my busy life, that I don’t have time for people in need?”

Jesus said the fate of those who don’t help the down and outs, is eternal separation from God. How could it have any different outcome? For when we help or ignore those in need, we help or ignore Jesus himself. *“Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you? And the king will answer, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”*

Jan you scrubbed Jesus’ floor this week. Joey you shoveled Jesus’ driveway. Jay and Alice you fed Jesus this week.

“Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”