

Lent 5B, 2009

Text: Mark 10:32-45

Title: Good Service

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Good service is getting harder to come by these days. So when you experience excellent service, it's something to take note of.

My wife and I were blessed to be able to go on a cruise for our honeymoon. One of the best things about a cruise is the service. There are people to take care of every detail of your trip. There are people to cook for you, serve you your food, and clean up after you. And it doesn't matter what time of day, you can always order room service and food delivered right to your room. There are people to clean up your room for you. There are people to carry your bags and deliver them to your room. There are people to entertain you- singers, dancers, and comedians. There are photographers, there are hairdressers, and there are tour guides at every port. The ship is fully staffed with stewards and waiters and porters everywhere you turn.

It's a bit of a shock when you come home and have to do your own cooking and cleaning. But it's nice every now and then to be waited on hand and foot.

Now there are some folks who get this sort of service every day. The rich. The powerful. Heads of State. They have plenty of servants- cooks, maids, butlers, chauffeurs, gardeners, to take care of their every need.

The disciples were looking forward to getting this sort of service. They wanted the cruise ship treatment. They wanted the millionaire treatment. They were looking forward to having people cook their meals, do their laundry, and entertain them. James and John were so bold as to ask for the number two and three spots in the Jesus administration.

The disciples have spent the better part of three years on the road with Jesus. The accommodations haven't been the greatest, to put things mildly. The food hasn't always been the best. They haven't been staying in any four star hotels, or eating in any fine dining restaurants. They left their jobs, they left their families behind to be roadies for Jesus.

Now the disciples are ready for the pay-off. Jesus is going to Jerusalem, and now things are going to happen. Their long journey is about to come to an end. This is the big moment that they've been waiting for. Everything has been leading up to this moment.

It's kind of like going to an amusement park to ride the roller coasters. You spend what seems like an eternity waiting in line. When you get to the front of the line, you can finally get into a car. Then they strap you into a seat and go through all the safety instructions. And then the car slowly inches up the track to the top of the first hill, and everyone waits with anticipation for the plunge and the rush and the screams.

For Jesus and the disciples, the wait is almost over. They've made it to the front of the line. They're in the car ready to go, and now they are inching towards the top of that first hill.

Next Sunday will be Palm Sunday, and the roller coaster ride of Holy Week will begin. First the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, then three days of teaching in the temple, then the upper room and the last supper, then the garden and the kiss, the torches and the clubs, then off to the High Priest's house and over to Pilates palace, finally the death march through town, up the hill and the cross planted on Golgotha.

All of that begins next Sunday.

We're not quite there yet, we're slowly inching towards the top of that first hill. And Jesus gives us the preview of this roller coaster ride in today's gospel. There will be mocking, spitting, and beating. There will be betrayal and judgment and execution. But in the end there will be resurrection.

The disciples aren't interested in the first bit- the mocking, spitting, beating, betrayal, judgment and execution. The disciples want to skip Friday and go straight to Sunday. They want to skip the cross and go straight to the empty tomb. They want to skip the darkness and go straight to the sunrise.

The disciples want the seats of glory, and the service that goes with the position. They want to sit in the owner's box to watch the game. They want to fly first class. They want to be served just like all other princes and powerful men.

The disciples got it all wrong. They want to be served, to be waited on hand and foot. But that's not what being a disciple is all about.

Now it's easy for us to pick on the disciples. It's easy for us to shake our heads at them and wonder how they could be so foolish and so wrong.

But how often do we have the same attitude? How often are we just like they are?

Now we may not expect to sit at Jesus' right or left hand, but we certainly deserve at least a better spot than most. As we look around the church, we are tempted to rank ourselves as better than those who aren't here as often or don't volunteer as much. We're certainly better than those who didn't bother to come this morning. And of course we're better than those who never make it at all.

Repent.

The Lord says that if you want to be great, be a servant. If you want to be first, be a slave. Think about the needs of others before you think about yourself.

That's what Jesus has come for. Jesus has come not to be served but to serve. Jesus came not as a master, but as a slave. Jesus is not the captain, He is the cabin boy. Jesus is the busboy, Jesus is the janitor, Jesus is the one who does the dirty, thankless jobs that no one else wants to do.

This is what Jesus has come to do.

Remember what will happen on Thursday night. The disciples will be gathered in the upper room. Their feet will be dirty and grimy and sweaty. No one wants to be the slave, no one wants to wash another's feet. And so Jesus does it. Jesus takes off His suit coat and tie, rolls up His sleeves, takes the towel and the basin and starts scrubbing. He does the dirty job that no one else wants to do.

Jesus came to do more than just wash feet. Jesus says, "The Son of Man came to give Himself as a ransom for many." Jesus' life is to be given as a ransom. This word used here, "lutron", is a Greek word used for a slave-price.

Here is the picture:

You are at an auction, and you are up for bid. You've gotten yourself into some serious debt, more than you can ever pay back. And so to raise some cash, your creditor decides to sell you to the highest bidder as a slave. And so you are brought in front of the crowd, ready to bid on you.

You are scared and nervous. Who will purchase you? What will life as a slave be like? You have no rights, you are completely powerless. Your future looks bleak, filled only with forced labor. You try to ignore the yells of the crowd and the call of the auctioneer.

Finally, the gavel comes down. The sale is complete. When you look up, you see a young Jewish man walking towards you. He must be your new owner. But instead of leading you off to your new life of slavery, He takes out a knife and cuts off your bonds. He takes the shackles off your legs. And He tells you that you are free. The debt has been paid. And then He takes your place on the auction block, willing to become a slave Himself. He gives up His freedom so that you may be set free.

This is what Jesus has come to do. To give His life as a ransom for you.

Jesus knew what He was getting Himself into. Last week we heard Jesus explain it all to Nicodemus- He came to be lifted up on the cross, to give His life for your salvation.

This week He lays it all out for the disciples. He is coming to Jerusalem to die. This is the greatest service that He can do for you. He lays down His life in service to you.

And Jesus' service to you doesn't end on the cross.

Every week, here in the Divine Service, the Lord serves you.

The church is a ship. The main part of the church, where you are now sitting, is called the nave, as in Navy. It's not a luxury cruise ship, not by any stretch of the imagination. But the service is even better. On the cruise ships, the people there are working for tips, for money. They work their way up the ladder, so that they don't have to do the dirty jobs any longer than necessary.

On the ship of the church, Jesus serves you. And He does it freely, out of love for you. The Lord of Heaven and Earth, the Almighty King of all Creation is your servant. And He serves you here and now in the Divine Service. In just moments He will be your waiter, as He serves you at His table. He has prepared a feast, a banquet for you of His own body and blood.

Here in the church the Lord serves you.

And He sends you out of this place to be servants like Him. He sends you out of here to serve your family, your wife and your husband, your children and your grandchildren. He sends you to serve your neighbors and your friends, your classmates and your teachers, your coworkers and your boss. Your life is a life of service.

In the next two weeks Jesus will show you what service is all about. We will watch Him go from the gates Jerusalem to the upper room, and then on to Gethsemane, to the temple mount, to the Praetorium, through the *Via Dolorosa* to Golgotha, and from Golgotha to the tomb.

Jesus knows what He's doing and why He's doing it. "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many." He's doing it for you. He is serving you. He is paying your ransom. He is setting you free, that you too might be a servant.