

Session E:

Come to Serve Jesus (Ministry, Pastoral Care, Community Outreach)

Prayer: Dear Lord, *Help us serve you.* As you have called us to your service, make us worthy of our calling and use us to your glory and the welfare of your people. By our life and service help us to enrich your church and world. Help us to see you in others who need our help. As we share your love with others, let us also experience and be transformed by that love.

Scripture Reflection: Matthew 25:31- 40

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 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; 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.'

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 them, '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.'

Or Scripture Reflection: Luke 15:11-32

Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them.

"A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' "

"So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe--the best one--and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!'

"Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

Discussion

What did you hear? What is Jesus saying about hospitality, relationships, servanthood? How does this illustrate The Great Commandment, The Great Commission?

What else does the Bible say about Christian service?

"Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received" (1 Peter 4:10). "Become slaves to one another for the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:13-14). "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

"We know love by this, that Jesus laid down his life for us--and we ought to lay down our lives for one another" (1 John 3:16). True love is not just a *feeling* that overwhelms us – but a fruit, action or deed. "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action" (1 John 3:18). "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).

Reaching Out to Others Transforms Us

Consider the process of discipleship we discussed during Session B and the importance of Christian service to discipleship. When Jesus is present in our lives, we as disciples *come to serve Jesus*. Through involvement in our unique ministries we see the signs and wonders of lives (including our own) being reoriented towards God. At this point, we identify Jesus and discover the Good News of the Gospel.

Ministry to others is especially important to our spiritual growth. "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life" (Ephesians 2:10). Jesus says in Matthew 25:31-46 that we are saved when we visit the sick or the imprisoned, provide food, drink or clothing to those in need, or welcome a stranger. As we share God's love with other people, we ourselves also experience and are transformed by that love.

In a recent church survey developed by Eric Swanson for the Leadership Network, 92% of the people responded that ministry to others enhanced their spiritual growth; not one person felt that it hindered their growth. 63% said ministering to others was at least as important to them as other spiritual disciplines such as prayer and Bible study, and 24% said serving others was more important in their spiritual development than other spiritual disciplines. 88% of the people who were ministering to others were satisfied with their spiritual growth, while 58% of the people who were not involved in ministry to others were less satisfied with their level of spiritual growth.

A passionate and growing Christian needs a ministry to others. One of the wonders of our faith is that we discover even greater spiritual gifts by using our gifts (I Corinthians 14:12). Our faith does not just grow by what we think or believe but by what we do and experience. We become Christians by loving and serving others. By serving Jesus, we also come to see and know Jesus.

This tells us something important about our mission as congregations: if we want to help people become stronger Christians, we need to get individuals in our church community involved in serving others. Any service to others may lead to spiritual growth – whether it is preaching the gospel, forming others or serving on a particular ministry team; or it is binding up the broken hearted and comforting those who mourn (Isaiah 61:1, 2); or it is sharing food with the hungry or providing the poor wanderer with shelter (Isaiah 58:7); or it is being "merciful as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36).

The keys for God's love to transform us are personal involvement and actually serving other people. The particular ministry that we are passionate about will depend on God's particular call to us based on where we are on our own spiritual journey. Mother Theresa reminded us "there are no great deeds, only small deeds done with great love." We each need to ask ourselves how we are intended to be instruments of God's love in the world.

The same is true of our church communities. There is no single way for a church to serve God. We need to be aware of our unique context and personality and recognize that God has a particular call for us; part of God's call is leaving up to us the possibilities of choosing what we are gifted at or enjoy doing. Christian ministry is obviously neither just for the clergy nor just giving money; it cannot just be left to the outreach committee. And churches who use outreach to balance their budget or who cut back on outreach to focus on other activities will slow their spiritual growth and become less passionate.

Many churches are involved in helping others with pastoral care ministries or community outreach ministries. Some churches are developing specific ministries on their own to meet

identified local needs, such as shoe sheds, shelters or food pantries. Other churches are partnering with local agencies, such as transitional living centers and Habitat for Humanity, to meet similar needs of the larger community. Individuals in these churches, and the church communities themselves, are discovering where they are invited to serve and are being transformed by these experiences. They are experiencing what it means to be part of the body of Christ and to grow more and more into that body (Ephesians 4).

For these reasons, the following questions are designed to emphasize three areas:

1. What is our overall plan for outreach? What is God calling us as a church to do? What are the unique needs that we can meet? What is our peculiar focus as a congregation (i.e., food, shelter, education or housing vs. trying to do everything)?
2. How do we emphasize a spiritual component (for volunteers and those served) to everything we do? (The book Common Purpose cites evidence that social programs are much less effective if they are not spiritually based.)
3. How do we involve as many people as possible in outreach ministries so that they can grow as Christians? (Ministry to the servants is nearly as important as ministry to those served, because these people will continue to grow and serve others and spread the kingdom.)

Planning for Outreach Ministries

Answer the following questions on worksheets or note cards and then discuss questions 2 through 4 as a group:

1. What pastoral care or service activities are you involved in? What needs of others does the congregation minister to?
2. What pastoral care or outreach activities are others involved in?
3. How are these pastoral care or outreach activities connected to this church community?
4. What additional pastoral care or outreach activities would you like to see this church community participate in?

What is this church community doing in the area of Christian service?

List outreach and pastoral care ministries and identify whether (a) they are parish sponsored and managed, partnerships with other agencies/churches, or individuals from the congregation participate; and (b) they utilize money, other resources or time and talent. What are the principal outreach ministries of the church?

How are we doing in having members participate in ministries beyond attending worship services?

What are our principal outreach and pastoral care focuses as a congregation?

How can we best encourage and support other outreach and pastoral care ministries?

Consider spiritual and volunteer support as well as funding.

What does this community value in the area of ministry?

Have we moved from a model of “volunteerism” to a model of gifts discernment and call?
 Could we connect more people to ministries through (a) getting each ministry group to define itself, celebrate and witness to the opportunities for involvement and make one to one invitations, (b) spotlight key ministries during worship three or four times per year, (c) highlight ministries in the bulletin, through ministry day and/or gift fair and an opportunity booklet?

Goal Starters

The church governing board needs to set detailed goals for the congregation. Some goals will come from fully answering the following questions:

What does God seem to be calling the congregation to do at this time? (It may be that the ministry of the past few years is affirmed and continued. It is also possible that while the former direction of ministry is affirmed, the congregation will recognize that new challenges call for new resources.)

What resources do we bring to the mission of the church in the area of service and what resources do we need to bring?

What resources do we need (skills, networks for sharing, consultants, workshops, training, funding, support)?

What are the goals of the congregation to come to serve Jesus?

When will they be accomplished?

Who is responsible for accomplishing these goals?

Goals might look like this:

Goals and strategies	When	Whom	Benchmarks
Ministry Goal: Feed and support outreach ministries as a community. Support will include spiritual support, time, talent and treasure and leadership training.			
Review vision for St. David's outreach ministries and integrate with community plans		Outreach Ministries Team	Identify ongoing ministries and discern church sponsored service projects, partnerships with other providers, support for individual ministries

Raise up gifted leaders and servants	Ongoing		From existing ministries, gifts course, ministry fair, pulpit and witness/faith sharing
Use financial resources to support outreach ministries plan		Outreach Ministries Team	

Resources for Further Study

Edington, Howard, The Downtown Church: The Heart of the City. Abingdon, 1996.

Schorr, Lisbeth B. Common Purpose: Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods to Rebuild America. Doubleday, 1997.

Woodson, Robert L. Sr. The Triumphs of Joseph: How Today's Community Healers are Reviving Our Streets and Neighborhoods. Free Press, 1998.