

IT WILL NEVER BE URGENT TO SERVE

JOHN 1:40-42; 6:5-9; 12:20-22

A wise old pastor was visiting a great, well-known church. He asked an usher if he might meet the person responsible for the church. The usher took him to the Senior Pastor, but the wise old pastor said, "No, this is not the man." Next, the usher took him to meet the chairman of the church board, but again the wise old pastor said, "No, this is not the person." Perplexed, the usher then led the old man to the wealthiest man in the entire church, but again the answer was the same. Finally, the wise old pastor said to the usher, "Take me to the kitchen." The usher was puzzled, but led the man down to the kitchen. There they found a modestly dressed woman in an apron, arms plunged into soapy water up to her elbows, cleaning dirty coffee cups and saucers. The wise old pastor turned to the usher and said, "Here, my friend, is the real secret of your success. I have seen it in church after church. Jesus said, 'If any person will be great, let that person become the servant of all.'"

The important is seldom urgent; the urgent is seldom important. That's an old saying that's worth pondering in this new year. We're doing just that in a three part message series this January. Last week I mentioned the fact that we're often tempted by "the tyranny of the urgent." Urgent stuff seems important at the time; that's why we spend time and exert energy to accomplish the urgent. Often, however, we discover after the fact that what seems so urgent at the time lacks any real long term importance. Ironically, important stuff doesn't often appear to us as being very urgent. So we procrastinate. We don't get around to it. We put it off. We don't give it the time and energy it deserves.

Here's another irony. This observation – the urgent is seldom important and the important is seldom urgent – is most often true in the spiritual aspects of your life. It's never urgent to know God, but it's important. It's never urgent to put your trust in Jesus, but it's important. It's never urgent to find a good church or to join it, but it's important. It's never urgent to share the good news about Jesus with someone, but it's important. It's never urgent to meet the need of a poor person, but it's important. Last week, the message discussed how it's never urgent to read, to know or to obey the Bible, but it's always important. Today, I suggest to you that it will never be urgent to serve the Lord. Important? Well, sure! Who would doubt or question that? But, if you don't watch out, you will just never get around to actually serving the Lord because it never seems urgent.

Most followers of Jesus will heartily agree that it's very important to serve the Lord. So, do you do it, then? What does it mean to serve the Lord? Here's a definition to mull over. Serving the Lord is using your spiritual gifts in ministry. Now, again, a spiritual gift is just some kind of ability God has given you to honor Him, bless others and build His Kingdom. The Bible has lists of spiritual gifts, but I don't believe those are meant to be exhaustive. A spiritual gift can be the ability to teach the Bible, but it can also mean the ability to turn a screwdriver. It can mean the ability to sing or play a beautiful song, but it can also mean knowing

how to welcome people at the front door of the church with kindness and care. You have to discover your gifts, commit your gifts, use your gifts and keep on growing in your gifts whatever they may be. Right now in all of our Sunday Bible classes we're doing a study of the biblical foundations for our new mission and vision statements. A big part of what's presented there is a recognition that our church is called to serve the Lord by serving the community around the church. We need to be winning lost people to Jesus. We need to be meeting practical needs in people's lives. We need to be offering healing for people's hurts through God's love. That will only ever happen if you – the members and friends of the great church – catch that vision of how God can use you in concrete, practical ways. Serving the Lord! It will never be urgent, true enough. But you can't overestimate its importance!

We often learn best and are most influenced by real life examples. I want you to think with me today about Andrew. Here's a Bible character who's a model of serving. He's not a main character in the Bible. Yes, Andrew was one of Jesus' twelve disciples. But there's not a lot of information about him. Three brief stories about Andrew provide three interesting glimpses, however.

ANDREW UNDERSTOOD THE VALUE OF INDIVIDUAL PEOPLE.

In each of the three stories about Andrew that we'll consider today, you'll see that he had a way of pouring himself into other people. Andrew was always finding people – or people were always finding Andrew – and then he would bring them to Jesus. He didn't bring crowds to Jesus – that wasn't his gift or calling. He brought individuals to Jesus. Let's read those three stories just now. (John 1:40-42; 6:5-9; 12:20-22) So, Andrew brings his brother, Simon Peter, to Jesus in John 1. In fact, we read that was the first thing he did after spending the whole day with Jesus. He brought the boy with the two fish and five loaves to Jesus in John 6. It seemed like an impossible situation to Andrew as well – trying to feed 5,000 people with one little boy's lunch. But he brought the boy to Jesus anyway. Then in John 12, we read how Andrew brought these Greek-speaking Jews to Jesus. They came to Philip first and then Philip takes them to Andrew. Andrew then does what Andrew does so well: he brings them to Jesus. So how did Andrew serve the Lord? Andrew served the Lord by serving the needs of individual people. By doing so, he underlines the tremendous value of individual people to God. People matter to God. And if they matter to God, they should – person by individual person – matter to you.

Let me offer some general truths about serving the Lord that are implied throughout the Bible and that followers of Jesus have discovered down through the centuries. First, your character is more important than your gifts. What you are is more important than what you do. What you do is an outgrowth of who you are. You may be a wonderfully gifted person, but if you're not allowing the Holy Spirit to shape your character, you'll be worthless in the Kingdom of God. The Lord may not have given you all the spiritual gifts or the same spiritual gifts He

gave someone else, but if you're filled with His love and you have a servant's heart, you'll be great in God's Kingdom regardless.

Second, being godly is more important than being right. That's getting to the whole issue of what spirit you serve with. Sometimes people can get so focused or become so intense about being right in your doctrine, or right about procedures or right about methods that they forget to be gracious, patient, loving, kind and prayerful. When that happens, you can quickly lose the forest for the trees, so to speak. I would rather be godly in my attitudes and actions but wrong about some procedure or method than be right about all of that but be wrong in my spirit. An ungodly person who does stuff right is kind of useless.

Third, love is more important than having great skills. You can be an outstanding preacher, a brilliant musician, a capable administrator or a compelling teacher, but if you don't love people and know how to show love to people, you will not be effective in the Kingdom of God. Love God and love people first and foremost. Then when you add to that foundation some important skills, you will be dynamite for the Kingdom of God. Four, you can never lose by being a perpetual learner. Serving the Lord and ministering to others well will mean that you're constantly growing and learning. You read or listen to books. You go to seminars. You observe and listen to other followers of Jesus. You have a teachable spirit. You want to be even more useful for the Kingdom of God tomorrow than you are today. Five, you remember that there's always room for one more servant. The Lord never turns anyone away that has a servant's heart.

I read about an 80 year old woman who became blind and was confined to her home. She got depressed and began to pray, "Dear Lord, there's nothing more I can do for You here on this earth. Please take me home to Heaven." But the Lord didn't take her home! One day, this dear woman looked at the Braille telephone directory that she'd been given and the Lord gave her an idea. She started calling people every day using that directory. She started with the names of people which started with "A" and continued straight on. She called absolute strangers all day long and told them about God's love in sending Jesus to us. She invited people she talked with to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Nine years later – at the age of 89 – that one woman had led over 5,000 people to personal faith in Jesus Christ. There's always room for one more servant!

ANDREW UNDERSTOOD THE VALUE OF INVISIBLE SERVICE.

Andrew was one of the first disciples picked by Jesus. Could he have been a leader among the disciples? We don't know. All we can know is that Andrew was content to stay in the background. The first thing he did after deciding to follow Jesus was to tell his brother, Peter, about Jesus. Peter became the leader of the disciples – not Andrew. Was he ever jealous of his brother, Peter? There's no evidence that he was. Apparently, Andrew knew it was just fine not to be noticed and not to be out in front. He excelled at behind the scenes ministry.

Here's what I know. I'm probably the most out in front servant this church has as your Senior Pastor. But I am glad to recognize that most of the ministry – most of the serving – in this or any church is behind the scenes ministry. It's faithful followers of Jesus just doing the stuff that needs to be done week in and week out. The guys who get together on Tuesday mornings and fix stuff around the church. Tutors for After School Clubs. People who lead Wednesday clubs meetings and adult Lifelines options. Men and women who show Jesus' love in classrooms on Sunday mornings. Gatherings of small teams of people to make decisions about this ministry or that serving effort. Visiting shut-ins. Helping out with the IT needs of the church, the digital signage ministry or the video and sound stuff on Sundays. Greeting people on Sunday or counting the offering. Time doesn't allow me to mention all the areas of service. No church could survive without that kind of invisible ministry. This church couldn't! Here's what I know about people who excel at behind the scenes ministry. They have pure motives. They serve regardless of applause, regardless of recognition, regardless of praise from others and regardless of expressions of gratitude. Why do they do it? They love Jesus!

Dawson Trotman was the founder of a wonderful Christian mission organization called The Navigators. At his funeral service some years ago, those attending were given the opportunity to share an anecdote or a personal story about Trotman with the rest of the group. A pastor from Taiwan stood up and said, "One day we all took a hike in the woods. It was very muddy. When we got back we were too tired to clean our clothes or shoes properly. We just fell into bed exhausted. When we woke up, all of our shoes were washed and shined." Dawson Trotman understood the value of invisible service.

Grab a Bible and turn with me to Matthew 20:20-28. Let me read it while you listen. Here we get God's perspective on both being a leader and being a servant. When Jesus' disciples sought greatness for themselves, He didn't rebuke them. Instead, Jesus taught them a completely different perspective. What's that? One, in the Kingdom of God, the greater serves the lesser. Two, in the Kingdom of God, being a leader means being a servant. Three, in the Kingdom of God, every citizen is a servant of the King who is Jesus.

So what are some of the implications of a perspective like that? When you join this church, you're not joining some fancy country club. It's true; some churches are basically just religious country clubs with crosses on top of their club building. That's not the mission or vision of Karl Road Baptist Church! It will never be our desire just to have a bunch of people show up on Sunday mornings, sit in a pew, sing a few songs, throw a few dollars in the offering plate, hear me preach and then go home and do nothing else. If you think you deserve some kind of heavenly reward for doing that, you don't understand what it means to serve the Lord. You've heard of "couch potatoes", haven't you? Well, there is such a creature as a "pew potato", too. Are you in danger of being a "pew potato"? The

Kingdom of God has no use for “pew potatoes”! Make sure you’re not one! When you join the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, you give up whatever privileges you think you’re entitled to and you pick up your ministry. When you join Karl Road Baptist Church – to paraphrase one of our former Presidents – “Ask not what this church can do for you; ask rather what you can do for Jesus through this church.” You’re not here to be served. You’re here to serve.

People often misunderstand what pastors or the paid staff at a church are supposed to do. The Bible makes my job as your pastor very clear. Here’s what it says, “Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.” (Eph 4:11-12 NLT) I believe the same principle articulated there applies to paid staff as well. Are we paid to do all the work of ministry ourselves? No. Are we paid to serve the Lord for you? No. It says there that our job is to equip you to do the work of ministry. We can do that in a variety of ways. We plan, administrate and organize along with you. We work alongside you. We train and equip you. We help to motivate and encourage you. We pray for and with you.

Here’s something to reflect on when it comes to being a servant. The real test of whether you’re a servant comes when someone treats you like one! When there’s no applause for your efforts... when there’s no recognition for your hard work... when there no praise for what you’ve done... or when - and this is even worse - when someone belittles or criticizes what you’ve done and makes it seem unimportant. I’m not defending ingratitude or lack of graciousness; I’m simply pointing to a reality of life when you’re serving the Lord. The Devil will do anything and everything to get you discouraged enough to stop serving the Lord – even using fellow believers who act like dopes if necessary. You need to remember that the One who really matters always sees what you do and He will not leave you unrewarded. What did Jesus say? “But when you give to someone in need, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.” (Mt 6:3-4 NLT) I know the subject is giving there, but I believe the same principle applies to serving. What you do for Jesus will never go unrewarded by Jesus.

ANDREW UNDERSTOOD THE VALUE OF INSIGNIFICANT GIFTS.

Andrew apparently was the only one among the disciples that thought Jesus might be able to use the two loaves of bread and five small fish that the little boy brought with him on that day when Jesus miraculously fed the 5,000. By the way, some scholars say that was just the men who were counted. The women and children present probably more than doubled the group. Andrew sensed that no gift is insignificant in the hands of Jesus. Some of the greatest followers of Jesus have been men, women, teenagers, boys and girls who were just very ordinary people. But they believed in an extraordinary God who could just possibly use them and their insignificant abilities for His glory and honor.

Let me ask you a question. How are you serving the Lord? Do you have a ministry? Do you know what it is? Do you do something in and through this church or out in the community of which you can say, "I do this because I love Jesus. I do this because it's my way of contributing to the Kingdom of God?"

Have you ever been a part of a team at some point in your life? It's usually a very positive experience. Do you want to join a team? That's really what this church is all about; it's a team for the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm not saying everybody ought to join the Karl Road Baptist Church team. There are many wonderful "teams" in our community who are trying to do the same thing we are – helping to build the Kingdom of God by reaching out and meeting lost people, needy people and hurting people and pointing them to Jesus. In fact, we're really all part of a much larger team that stretches across the planet. For God's sake, and I say that with the utmost respect and reverence, join a team and get busy serving the King. Stop being a spectator sitting out there in the stands. God called you to be a participant. Stop sitting on the bench. Stop standing on the sidelines. Stop being a critic. God called you to be an encourager. Stop putting it off just because serving the Lord never seems to be urgent. Join a team and get busy for the Lord Jesus Christ. It's that important.

Back in the mid 1990s, Cal Ripken Jr. broke the all time record for playing in consecutive baseball games. He played shortstop for the Baltimore Orioles baseball team. That was a glorious moment in Ripken's life and career that the whole sports world celebrated. And rightly so. But it's easy to forget that Cal Ripken played when he didn't feel like playing. He played when the Orioles lost 21 straight games at one time. He played when attendance figures were down. He played when there were problems at home. He played when he was in a batting slump. Ripken put on his uniform every day and went out to his position on the field and gave it his very best effort. When asked about his accomplishment, Ripken said, "I just go out every day to do the best I can." Karl Road Baptist Church exists for you to do your very best for Jesus all the time. There will be lots of reasons to get discouraged, to give up, to let up, to back off and to put off serving the Lord. Don't do it. Jesus deserves your very best every day. So, go out everyday and do the best you can for Him.

The important is seldom urgent; the urgent is seldom important. It will never be urgent to serve the Lord. But eternity will reveal its importance.