

SERMON – September 24, 2006
Mark 9 “Service leads to Greatness”

G&P...

My family had gone down to Laguna Beach, Calif to see my great Aunt Hazel. This was in the mid-1960's. My great Aunt was prolific artist in this little artisan beach area south of Los Angeles. We always went to the beach when we were there. Our favorite place was a beach called “Sharks Cove.” It was a sandy beach framed by rock formations that jutted out into the ocean. The currents were fairly safe there. We would boogie board and body surf in the waves as they came rolling in.

Now I remember this day for several reasons. First, there was a platoon of Marines there from Camp Pendleton doing some last R&R before shipping off to the southeast asia. There were great guys and some really good body surfers. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a small plane come into view. It was a Piper Cub two seat plane. We watched it for awhile, and then we noticed that it was trying to land on the ocean. Then we noticed that it didn't have pontoons on which to land on the water.

This plane was in trouble and was trying to come as close to the beach as possible. It crashed into the sea about 75 yards from the beach and the surf began to tear apart the plane. Now I am 11 years old at the time, standing in the water dumbfounded. But I watched as this platoon of Marines sprang into action. Some of the dads on the beach had gone to get the rope from the emergency shed, one had gone to call the emergency folk, and the marines went out into the surf to rescue the pilot and his passenger.

They were able to tie a rope to the tail of the plane and begin to pull it in as others tried to get the passengers out onto the beach. Everyone worked together, marines, dads and moms, and the fire department rescue guys. No one cared for their own safety, everyone's thoughts and efforts were focused on the passengers of the plane. Now I do not remember the outcome for the passengers, whether they lived or died, I remember them being lifted into the ambulance and taken away in a hurry.

Soon the craziness of the moment had passed and people began to resume what they had come to sharks cove to do. It certainly wasn't to rescue people from a downed plane. But what kept that memory alive is the fact that for a moment in time, no one thought of only themselves. No one thought that maybe they shouldn't be flying up their and they can fend for themselves. The words that I remember my parents saying: It was fortunate that so many people were at the beach that day to help them, including the platoon of men serving our country.

Service and sacrifice go together in the language of the christian. Often without thinking, we open our hands to serve. It is apart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

This is where our text for this morning leads us. For his followers have been arguing along the

way about who is the greatest in this group. I suppose one could name any number of people. But Jesus doesn't care for that kind of word in this group. O, he knows that it is the predominate word in the culture. For all want to be the greatest, because then they would be served by those who were not so great. This is what the Romans and gentiles believed and practiced and to a certain extent so did the Jews. It was cultural.

But Jesus is about to turn that culture and that world upside down. He takes a small child and puts him in his lap. The greatest in the kingdom of God shall be the least, and the least shall be the greatest. Pointing to the child:

“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the One who sent me.”

Jesus is teaching a whole new ethic. No longer will one live to be served. But the one who follows Jesus will learn to serve even the least in the kingdom. Not only will one serve but also welcome in that service so that as one welcomes the least, they welcome Jesus and they welcome Jesus then they welcome God into their service.

This is a whole new teaching and it contradicts the the way the world worked then and even the way it works now. O, we might understand that we should serve and love God. Even the gentiles knew this. But when one throws in the neighborhood to love and serve, we start to draw the line. When we begin to look at the world as a global community that is getting smaller and smaller, we see that some things have not changed since the time of Jesus.

The way we kill our neighbor has not changed, we have become more sophisticated in the way we kill. But death is so prevalent now in our world that one cannot watch even a minute of news without hearing of it. Evil is here and it must be named as such. Such evil only brings death that leads to more death.

TO follow this path will only lead to more death that gives only death. There is no life that comes out of the killing of the children in Darfur, Sudan or the murder of a mother in Stillwater as her children run for help. There is no life that comes out of the negative ad campaigns that try to destroy one candidate so that the other will look good to the voters. And the neighbor is not served. And the world is not better off.

Jesus takes a different road. It is a road that leads to the cross. But before he goes to the cross, he teaches us about the whole genius behind service. TO serve out of love is to lift up the one the person is serving. It is to put your playtime away and pull two passengers out of a plane that has crashed into the surf, with no regard for yourself. You just do it because that is what you were created

to do: serve.

Why is it that we feel so good after we have done something for someone else? Why is that the quilt ladies gather each week year after year, decade after decade to sew old material into warm quilts? Its not because of the coffee break, the coffee and banana bread hit the spot. It is because there is something enate in each of us that moves us to serve out of love and sacrifice. Jesus taps into that part of us that was put there at the moment of creation. He shows us how to serve, how to move beyond ourselves and reach out to others.

Sometimes we would like to serve, but we get caught. I received an e-mail that goes something like this:

> I decide to water my garden. As I turn on the hose in the driveway, I look over at my car and decide my car needs washing. As I start toward the garage, I notice that there is mail on the porch table that I brought up from the mail box earlier. I decide to go through the mail before I wash the car. I lay my car keys down on the table, put the junk mail in the garbage can under the table, and notice that the can is full.

So, I decide to put the bills back on the table and take out the garbage first. But then I think, since I'm going to be near the mailbox when I take out the garbage anyway, I may as well pay the bills first. I take my check book off the table, and see that there is only one check left. My extra checks are in my desk in the study, so I go inside the house to my desk where I find the can of Coke that I had been drinking.

I'm going to look for my checks, but first I need to push the Coke aside so that I don't accidentally knock it over. I realize the Coke is getting warm, and I decide I should put it in the refrigerator to keep it cold. As I head toward the kitchen with the Coke, a vase of flowers on the counter catches my eye—they need to be watered. I set the Coke down on the counter, and I discover my reading glasses that I've been searching for all morning.

I decide I better put them back on my desk, but first I'm going to water the flowers. I set the glasses back down on the counter, fill a container with water and suddenly I spot the TV remote. Someone left it on the kitchen table. I realize that tonight when we go to watch TV, I will be looking for the remote, but I won't remember that it's on the kitchen table, so I decide to put it back in the den where it belongs, but first I'll water the flowers. I pour some water in the flowers, but quite a bit of it spills on the floor.

So, I set the remote back down on the table, get some towels and wipe up the spill. Then I head down the hall trying to remember what I was planning to do.

At the end of the day:

- > the driveway is flooded
- > the car isn't washed,
- > the bills aren't paid,
- > there is a warm can of Coke sitting on the counter,
- > there is still only one check in my check book,
- > I can't find the remote,
- > I can't find my glasses,
- > and I don't remember what I did with the car keys.
- >
- > Then when I try to figure out why nothing got done today,
- > I'm really baffled because I know I was busy all day long,
- > and I'm really tired.
- >
- > I realize this is a serious problem, and I'll try to get some
- > help for it, but first I'll check my e-mail (author unknown)

Ever have days like that! I do. We discover that there is a need to re-focus our life on the One thing that is important. That one thing that brings life. That one thing that opens our eyes to see Jesus in our life right now. It is a grace that loves us even though we might spend our days like this. A grace that resurrects us out of the death of this world and into new life now and to come. A grace that moves us from the monotony of lost days and into a living faith that makes a difference in the world right now.

Buckwheat Donahue—a resident of Skagway, Alaska—is planning a journey from Key West, Florida, to Nome, Alaska. Started in October, 2005, Donahue walked 5000 miles and paddle 2,000 miles across North America. His intention is to raise funds for building a medical clinic in Skagway. 327 days later he walked into Skagway raising \$60,000.00. His congregation gave an offering of \$10,000.00 which prompted Buckwheat to give out a great howl of joy. Donahue suffered congestive heart failure in 2003, and if he had been in Skagway the absence of a medical clinic would have rendered his survival questionable.

In addition to raising money, Buckwheat Donahue intended to use the journey as a way to raise awareness about heart disease and another ailment he suffers from □ diabetes.

He is influenced by Jack London's words: "The proper function of man is to live, not to exist. I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them. I shall use my time."

"That's what I want to do," Donahue muses. "I want to use my time." Choked with emotion, he adds, "And I'd just like to share it with other people."

Sherry Simpson, "Buckwheat's Long Road Home," Alaska Magazine (July 2005), pp. 36-39, 73; submitted by Ted De Hass,
Bedford, Iowa

In that story we see a glimpse of God at work. A glimpse of the one who created us and redeemed us. So that has Jesus Christ is crucified, he takes all of our mistakes and our wanting to be the greatest unto himself. For his death leads to life, out of the cross we see resurrection. We are given the power to be the neighbor who cares, and serves.

Out of that experience came the drive to live, and not only live, but make a difference in his living. This is what is meant by life coming out of death, this is what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. TO be touched by the grace of Jesus Christ in the heart and to live our lives in no other way than to serve in Love.

AMEN