

Life Together – Service

One thing that I find so remarkable about our Scripture is how relatable it often is. I mean, these are texts that were written 2000-3000 years ago and sometimes you read something and think, “Wow, I can totally relate to that.” And I think one of the best examples we have of this is in our Old Testament reading today where Moses is criticized by one of his in-laws.

I mean, Come on. That’s something that we can all relate to, right?

So here’s what was happening. Moses had led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and they were wandering in the wilderness. Understandably, the people looked to Moses as their leader. Now there’s a lot of things that come with being a leader but one thing is that you are the person people go to when they have a complaint. And Moses was hearing a lot of complaints.

We don’t have enough food.

We’re thirsty.

And they always seemed to blame Moses for these things. You brought us out of Egypt only to starve us in the desert. Didn’t you have a plan?

But sometimes their complaints weren’t about Moses but were about each other. In the passage we read, Moses was listening to the people bringing disputes against each other. They wanted him to judge between them. They wanted Moses to decide who was right and who was wrong.

And that’s when Moses’ father-in-law had seen enough.

“What you’re doing is not good,” he told Moses.

He went on to tell Moses that there’s no way he can keep going like this. He’s going to wear himself out. Moses needed help, he needed to share leadership responsibilities, he needed to accept his own limitations.

Now, remember that in bringing the people out of slavery in Egypt, God wasn’t just setting them free but God was calling them to build a different kind of society, a different way of doing life together. Whereas in Egypt, Pharaoh was all powerful, the goal was not for Moses to become like Pharaoh. The goal was to build a community based on peace and justice and for that to happen, the new society could never be based on a single, solitary person. The work of building their new community must become, not just the work of Moses, but the work of everyone.

In our New Testament reading, we see this same dynamic in the early church. The apostles, who were the original disciples of Jesus, quickly realized that they couldn't do all the work of leading the early church themselves. They needed help. Specifically, they realized that something that was important and needed to happen, wasn't happening. Some of the widows, who would have been the most vulnerable people of the time, weren't receiving any food. They were going hungry. The apostles were so busy that they hadn't realized that people in their own community didn't have enough food to eat.

Now if you were here last week, you may remember that in the Scripture from Acts, we read that in the early church, they shared all that they had so there was not a needy person among them. And yet, just a few chapters later, we see that there's a lot of needy people, a lot of hungry people. You see the book of Acts not only describes what the early church did but it also describes who they wanted to be. They wanted to be a community where there was not a needy person among them. That was a central part of their mission statement. But it didn't take them long to realize that if they were going to live into that mission, they'd have to share the work and develop more leaders. The work of the early church couldn't depend on just a few people. It had to depend on everyone.

Friends, for both the Israelites wandering in the wilderness and for the early Christian communities, they realized that if the communities they were striving to build were going to be successful, then they were going to need everybody doing their part. It couldn't just depend on a single, solitary leader. It couldn't just depend on a small group of people. It was going to depend on everyone finding a way to serve.

We are continuing our pledge campaign sermon series this week. Last week, we talked about how it takes all of us sharing of our financial resources to do the work of the church. And often in these types of pledge campaigns, churches will only talk about money. And don't get me wrong. Money is important. We can't do the work of ministry without your pledges and your financial contributions. But also, it is every bit as important for each of us to not only give what we can financially but for us to also find ways of serving.

Think back to the children's message. Did you hear all the things the kids named as their favorite parts of church? And then think about all the people who stood up. You see, the things they love, the things that make church a loving and meaningful community for them only happen because people choose to make them happen, because you choose to serve.

Now, let me ask you the same question. What is one of the most meaningful parts of our community as a church for you? Think about that for just a minute.

Now imagine for a minute what all has to happen for that thing – your favorite thing, the thing you find so meaningful – to be able to happen. My guess is that it probably takes more than any of us realize to do those things.

You see, like we talked about with money, finding a way to serve – whether it's on a committee, or volunteering in Sunday school, or hosting coffee hour, or any number of other things – is not just about filling a slot, it's not even just about doing that one specific job. Think about coffee hour for a minute. The specific act of service is to bring and set up food to share with people. Now that, in and of itself, is a good thing. But did you hear what the kids said about it? Did you see how excited they were?

You see coffee hour is about a lot more than just eating some food, every week, kids in our church are creating memories. Twenty years from now, they will remember eating fruit and brownies. They will remember running around Johnson Hall and being greeted by nothing but smiling faces. They will remember that there was a faith community that loved them so well – all because someone decided to bring a little food to share, all because someone decided to serve.

And that's just one example. I could have picked any number of things that happen here every week that may seem small but are so vital for the kind of community we hope to be. No act of service is too small or insignificant.

In our pledge mailing this year, we not only sent out a card for a monetary pledge but we also included a card about ways you can serve. There's an online form as well. Friends, I mean this when I say I believe this card about service is every bit as important as the card about money. The work of the church truly takes all of us.

And let me end by saying two things about it. Just like we have differing levels of financial resources, we also have different capacity levels in terms of time to serve. Please know that any gift – whether financial or service – is important. No gift is insignificant. And the call to give and the call to serve is never meant to make you feel overwhelmed. I truly mean it when I say each of us is called to give what we can, to serve in what ways we can.

And secondly, you may be wondering where you should serve. That's a good question and I can certainly offer you some suggestions. But what I would first say to you if you asked me that question is, "What are you passionate about?" You see I believe church is a place where we should be able to do those things that make us feel alive. We don't need you to be anybody but you. That's really what this form is about – it helps us learn where you would most like to serve.

And while this list may be comprehensive, I know that there is always some amazing idea we haven't thought of.

Friends, this is your church. This is our church. And that means we are all called to give what we can – our time, our gifts, and our service – as we strive to do life together and live out God's call for our community. Amen.