

“A Heart for the House-Service”- Mark 1:16-20

When I was growing up it was important to help around the house. My father had a piercing whistle that when we heard that whistle and we were outdoors we were to stop what we were doing and come home immediately. We were to go out and play and have fun, but when the whistle blew we were to stop and come no matter where we were or what we were doing. If we stop and listen God whistles for us. He whistles for us and what he is saying is, “Stop what you are doing now and come quickly. I need you. I have a job for you that only you can do. “

We are looking at the fourth in our series of sermons entitled, “A Heart for the House”. We show our love for God and for the church by taking very seriously the four vows we pledge when we join the church. We are to support our church with our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and today we look at the last part of that vow: our service.

In our passage today from Mark we see Jesus walking and he comes upon Simon, Andrew, James and John fishing. As Jesus walked by them he said to them, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of people”. They dropped everything and came running. They did this because they heard the call of God or the whistle of God to drop everything and come to God immediately. They were not preachers or scholars or wealthy men, instead they were regular folk who were willing to respond, follow, and serve. Those are the type of people Jesus is looked for then and now. This is an excellent lesson in serving God. It is not so much ability but rather availability.

The available just hear the whistle, the call of God and offer themselves up to God to be used in any way possible.” These are the people who say to God and to their church, “Here I am, Lord, send me. Here I am Lord, use me. Here I am, Lord, give me a job.” Remember it is not ability, but availability.

So what does it mean to serve God and serve the church? First of all, we serve because we are thankful. When we give ourselves in service to God and to the church we are saying, thank you for what he has done for us by serving. We are

grateful for what Jesus did for us on the cross. We are grateful for all that he has given us, so in response to those gifts we find ways to be available.

Second of all, our service is a symbol of our love. The Bible reminds us that we are called to be servants of love. We are to be servants, not privileged people, not pampered people, not passive people, not holier-than-thou people, but servant people. On page after page of the Bible we hear the following commands: serve, love, give of yourself, reach out to others. The author, Philip Yancey discovered that those people who do not see themselves as stars but as loving servants are radiantly happy people. There is incredible joy and serenity in their lives. They lose their lives in love and servant hood and yet find deep meaning and purpose in life. God doesn't want your ability, but your availability. We can serve in love through our encouraging and life strengthening words, attitudes, and actions.

I can remember when I preached my first sermon at Verona United Methodist Church. I was 20 at the time. The minister George Gravitt invited me to come and give a sermon. I was trying to figure out what God wanted me to do with my life. My parents were in the congregation. My friends were there from college. I spoke for about six minutes. I must have gulped down at least three glasses of water. I think I preached from Genesis to Revelation. When it was over I felt bad because I knew I had done a bad job. But people came up to me, including the minister afterwards and their words of encouragement prompted me to begin the journey towards my calling in ministry. They served God that day by showing love in ministry towards me.

Third of all, our service is a symbol of our commitment. Making commitments today seems very hard for some people. People are afraid to make commitments. We see it in relationships, at work, and especially in volunteer work. People do not seem to be able to find the time to serve. People seem to wait to see if something better comes along before they commit. Jesus demanded commitment from his followers.

He was a retired carpenter who used his gifts of building with wood to build the kingdom of God. His church had collected clothes for China and he had built

the crates they were to be shipped in. He worked all day and enjoyed what he did. However, when he got home he discovered that his new eye glasses were missing. They had apparently fallen into one of the crates and were now on their way to China.

It was the time of the Great Depression and those glasses had cost him \$20: A huge sum of money in those days. He got upset and cried out to God how unfair it was. "I give my time and talent and look what happens." Months later the director of the orphanage came from China to thank the church for their generosity. He shared how much the children had been so excited and so grateful. Then the director goes on to thank the congregation for the glasses that were sent. The Communists had come and overrun the orphanage destroying everything including his glasses. He could not afford to go out and buy new a new pair. Along with not seeing well, he had developed bad headaches. Then the crates came and amazingly there was this pair of glasses as if they had been custom made just for him. He thanked the congregation profusely.

The church people listened, happy for the miracle of the glasses, but silently they were thinking "He must have us mixed up with another church because we did not send any glasses." But sitting quietly in the back of the room, with tears streaming down his face, an ordinary carpenter realized that the Master Carpenter had used him in an extraordinary way.

What extraordinary way might God want to use each of us as we respond to the vow of servant hood? Remember it's more about availability rather than ability. God calls all Christians into ministry. God has a place of service for each of us. God blows his whistle and says to each one of us, I have a job for you to do that is especially suitable for you. If we respond and do our best, then God will take it from there. So how can we serve? We can serve through helping with our food pantry ministry on Thursday. We need to revamp our children's ministry in Sunday school. Do you have the availability to help with that? We need greeters on Sunday morning to be warm welcomes and to give persons a bulletin. Are you available to help with that? We need people to read scripture in worship? Do you have the availability to do that? We need people to help with children's church on

Sunday. Are you available to help with that? There are all kinds of ways that we can work for the kingdom of God.

As we will soon enter a new year in the life of the church, I want to invite you to pray about how you can help us this coming year. There are many needs around here that need dedicated committed loving people to come and serve God and serve the church. This is time that will be well spent. Your time is valuable, but what a wonderful way to spend your valuable time by serving an eternal God doing eternal things. Remember it is availability, not ability that God's wants and needs.