

Micah 6:6–8 (NIV)

⁶With what shall I come before the LORD
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
⁷Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
⁸He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

Mark 10:42-45 (NRSV)

⁴²So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ⁴³But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

James 2:14–17 (NIV)

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

1 Peter 4:7–11 (NIV)

⁷The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ⁸Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. ¹¹If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen

It is as simple as this: we are called to serve, not to be served.

As I write this, our church has just finished hosting the Annual Conference of the UMC’s North Texas Conference. Hosting this conference was an enormous undertaking that took months of planning and work by our staff, headed up by Kay Richardson. But it could not have happened without the army of volunteers who were ready and anxious to serve. There were 286 volunteers filling 382 slots! Some pulled double and even triple duty. It was a lot of work, but it was joy-filled work. And at the same time, Spark Tank projects are launching across the city with a lot more to come.

Giving of our time, our talents, and our resources, giving of all that we have and can do, this is the life to which Jesus has called us. It isn’t even really about a list of all the things we are to do; it is, rather, simply a way of being. We are to have servant’s hearts. If Jesus came to serve (Mark 10:45), how could it be any less so for us? The truth is that

this doesn't come easy to many of us. The world often seems to operate by a different ethic. It has always been this way.

Jesus understood well how the world worked, then as now. He said rulers of all types lord it over their "subjects." The weak are pushed aside and left behind. The visible hand of management too often becomes the iron hand of tyranny. Ask yourself, how many Americans would describe their bosses as servant leaders? Would you?

Yet, in today's passage from Mark, Jesus leads his own disciples towards servanthood. They aren't to live as the world lives. Instead, whoever among them aspires to greatness in the family of Christ must be the servant of everyone. The organization chart is to be turned upside down and left that way. And as the exemplar of a servant leader, Jesus will give his own life in service to his disciples and to all humankind; he will be "a ransom for many."

Servant?

The Greek word used in Mark 10:45 is *diakonēsai*, translated "serve." In a standard Greek/English NT dictionary, its meaning is "serve, wait on; care for, see after, provide for." *Diakonēō* (the root) is distinct from the Greek words *douleúō* (to serve as a slave), *therapeúō* (to serve willingly), *latreúō* (to serve for wages), and *leitourgéō* (to do public service). The word, *diakonēō* distinctly refers to a personal service.¹ Jesus demonstrated this service when he washed the feet of his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion. They were aghast of course. Slaves were to wash feet, not the Lord!

The Servant People of God

An enduring biblical image of God's people is the *servant people of God*. In the Old Testament, God saves the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt so that they might serve him. (Exodus 8:1, 9:1, 10:3). Job is a servant of God (1:8, 42:8). Israel is the servant of God, whom God has saved (Isaiah 41:8, 48:20). This image of God's servant people is further developed in the New Testament and, like so much of Jesus' teachings and actions, is taken to levels that can almost make our heads spin!

Jesus' proclamation of the Good News is a proclamation that he is Lord and the Jews of his day would have heard this to be the claim of a master who is to be served. But . . . when Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover, the disciples fell to arguing about who would sit at Jesus' side. Jesus tells them that they don't really know what they are asking for . . . whoever wishes to be first among them must be the servant of them all! Perhaps most remarkably, Jesus said that he had come "not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (see Matt 20:20-38, Mark 10:32-45, and Luke 22:24-27).

Just in case his disciples didn't get it (as they usually didn't!), Jesus drove home the importance of servanthood on the night of the last supper. Jesus gathered his disciples together to share the Passover supper, only to find that they were again arguing about which of them was the greatest. They would have been seated on couches set beside a low table, with their bodies toward the table and their feet dangling off the back of the couch. Because the roads and streets were so dusty, it was customary for the host to provide water for the washing of feet. But the actual washing was a very servile task to be done by a servant, slave, or perhaps submissive women or children, never by the men themselves. You can imagine all the disciples lying around waiting to see who would come in to wash their feet. Then Jesus did the unthinkable. He rose, removed his outer robe and began washing the feet of the disciples. Peter couldn't believe what he is seeing! When Jesus was finished (you can picture the disciples sitting open-mouthed!), he told that he had done this as an example to them and that they should do as he had done. He washed their feet and they ought to wash each other's feet. Jesus had lived out his teachings on servanthood right before their eyes, abolishing all notions of any pecking-order in the people of God.

¹From the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* by Kittel, abridged by G. Bromiley.

But it is this personal service that James (the half-brother of Jesus) focuses on in the NT letter bearing his name. After Jesus' own costly and personal service, James writes, how could disciples possibly claim to have faith in Jesus and yet fail to serve those in need? Hungry people need food, not just encouragement. Freezing people need a coat, not merely a warm hug. As James pointedly notes, our faith will be demonstrated by what we do, far more so than by what we say. Echoing Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, James insists that professions of faith will be seen in actions, and if they are not, then the faith is absent. The true disciple is the one who hears and *does* (Matthew 7:24-29).

Faith and deeds

Many Christians have tried to drive a wedge between our faith and our deeds, as if admitting that God expects us to actually love God and love neighbor in all that we do somehow diminishes the truth that our salvation is by the grace of God and grace alone. Martin Luther, for example, actually wanted to rip the book of James out of the New Testament, calling it "a letter of straw." He read James to be claiming that we might somehow make ourselves acceptable to God rather than rely only on our faith in Jesus.

But Luther was wrong. The old hymn, "Trust and Obey," gets it right. There is no space between faith and deeds, between our trust in Jesus and our living. It is an "and" not an "or." As Paul puts it in his letter to the Galatians, those who have faith in Jesus Christ have been indwelt by God's Holy Spirit and will, necessarily, bear the fruit of God's Spirit (see Gal. 5).

As Jesus served us all, the "ransom for many," so Jesus' disciples serve others. It is simply what disciples do. We must learn to listen to the call of our hearts to serve. We can try to tune out the urging of the Holy Spirit, but the insistent call to serve will be there, urging us to live out the discipleship we claim.

Serving by giving

But there is only so much any of us can do with just our own hands and feet. Even collectively, we are limited by space and time. Thus, the giving of our money to this work enables us to do things none of us could or would. You and I can't provide nursing care to a young mother in Costa Rica – but we do so through our giving. Few of us could proclaim the Good News in Spanish, but we can help a Spanish-language congregation build a church and provide services to their community.

Often, when we speak of our responsibilities in the body of Christ, we speak of our "stewardship." In Greek, the word for house is *oikos* and the person who oversees the house, who manages it, is called an *oikonomos*.² This word is used ten times in the New Testament and is translated variously (based on the context) as steward, or manager, or treasurer (e.g. in 1 Peter 4:10 above). Jesus tells a parable about a bad steward (Luke 16:1-13). This is the story of a trusted steward who squanders the property of his master, which was a particularly despicable crime in Jesus' day. The moral of the story is something like this: use what you possess to serve people because everything you have was given you by God!

When writing to a congregation he founded in Corinth, Greece, Paul referred to himself as "a servant of Christ and steward of the mysteries of God," and as a steward, was required to be "trustworthy" (1 Cor 4:1-2). Peter reminds us that we, the people of God, are to be "good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10). Clearly, Paul and Peter knew that their responsibilities to God extended far beyond their possessions.

Years ago, I came across an article by Leonard Sweet³ suggesting that "steward" is probably not the best way to think about this. After all, he notes, who really uses the

² This is a compound word – *oikos*, house + *nomos*, law

³ From "Freely You Have Received, Freely Give," by Leonard Sweet.

word anymore, other than to refer to someone you might meet on a cruise ship! Instead, Sweet suggests that “trustee” is more meaningful for us and would be a better translation of the Greek. Many of us have some experience with trusts and the responsibilities held by trustees, even if it is simply some sort of family estate. When we think of ourselves as God’s trustees, the message of the Bible becomes a little clearer. We are given dominion over God’s creation, not so we can rule as a tough or selfish taskmaster, but so we can be effective trustees of God’s wealth, managing it wisely, helping it to grow and flourish. God’s creation is not ours, we don’t own it; rather, we hold it in trust. We hold the Christian faith in trust and we are charged with guarding what has been entrusted to us (1 Timothy 6:20). We, God’s people, the body of Christ, the church, have received a treasure, a trust, given by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 1:14). This treasure is the truth about God and the proclamation that Jesus is Lord!

Understanding our responsibilities as being those of a trustee turns talk of “stewardship” on its heads. I’ve been in many Sunday school classes over the years and when stewardship time rolled around, we would always end up talking about tithing. Pretty soon, somebody would ask the inevitable question – do we tithe on pre-tax or after-tax income!

But this is all backwards. It assumes that all the stuff and money we have is ours and the challenge is to figure out how much we want or need to give to God. Do I give 1%, 2%, 5%, or even 10%? Tithing is a long tradition in the Christian church, but it has always been more talk than tithe. We could spend a lot of time talking about tithing in this study, but we’re not. You see, tithing is not the approach of the trustee. Trustees of God’s house recognize that everything we have – all the money, cars, houses, stuff – is a gift from God. We use what we need and then grow the rest for God. Do we need to keep for own use 80% of what God entrusts to us? 85%? 90%? 95%?

John Wesley understood this. When he was a young man he made 30 pounds a year. He figured out that he needed 28 pounds a year to live on and gave two pounds to the church. When his income increased to 50 pounds, he kept 28 and gave 22. When he made 100 pounds a year, he kept 28 and gave 72. Let those who have ears, hear!

St. Andrew’s Starting Point Program

Starting Point is the fastest way to get connected into deeper fellowship and growth here at St. Andrew. Through three dynamic sessions, **Discover St. Andrew, Get Connected**, and **Make an Impact**, you will have the opportunity to tour the church campus, meet key staff members, connect with some of our current members, and ask questions about our ministries and programs. This series of classes is held monthly at 9:30 a.m. in room 131. Go to:

www.standrewumc.org/starting-point for more information.

DISCOVER ST. ANDREW

This class provides newcomers and prospective members with a sense for what St. Andrew is all about. It covers the **vision and core values** of the church, as well as fundamentals of the faith and the basic disciplines needed for spiritual growth.

GET CONNECTED

This class covers everything you need to **grow in community**. It covers the biblical call to include other believers in our walk with God. It also provides opportunities to get plugged into a small group at St. Andrew where people experience growth through authentic, godly relationships. This matches our ministry strategy of Worship and Connect.

MAKE AN IMPACT

This class teaches how you can **serve and give with impact**. It includes biblical principles of using your time, talent, and treasures to intentionally serve the church and those around you, and provides opportunities to begin serving. It also discusses how to use your unique abilities to influence the Kingdom and lead others on a journey with Christ. In addition, an opportunity for membership will be provided. This matches our ministry strategies of Serve and Give.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. The biblical understanding of love for God and neighbor is built on concrete notions of love as sacrifice and action. Love is caring. Love is serving. Thus, the obvious, and oftentimes difficult, question is “How are we serving God and neighbor?” What did we do yesterday? Today? What will we do tomorrow? Where are our priorities? What are the barriers to our serving God with all our efforts and enthusiasm? How do we overcome these barriers? How do we find the joy in service?

2. When founding and guiding numerous congregations, Paul urged them to remember that the body of Christ has many members with many varied and wonderful gifts. Paul teaches that all of us are to serve the community in unity and harmony, but he also knew that we are all pretty different people. Some of us are equipped to teach, some are equipped to build budgets, some are leaders, and still others are equipped to be especially caring and supportive of those in crisis. How do we discover the individual gifts that God has given each of us? How do we go about finding the places in the church where we can best serve?

3. We live in a very achievement-oriented community and many of us come from professions filled with hierarchies of power and knowledge. In the church, there are no hierarchies of service – one way of serving the church is not spiritually superior to another. Do you find this hard to really accept? Is our seeming need for hierarchy a barrier to service? Or is it a lack of confidence? Or a lack of training? How do we overcome this?

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Monday, Joshua 24:14-28 The renewal of the covenant and the people’s promise to serve God.</p>	<p>Tuesday, Malachi 3:13-18 Israel is reminded that the righteous serve God.</p>
<p>Wednesday, Matthew 25:31-36 The parable of the sheep and the goats</p>	<p>Thursday, John 13:1-20 Jesus washes the feet of the disciples at the last supper.</p>
<p>Friday, Ephesians 4:1-16 Paul appeals for unity and the use of our God-given gifts in the body of Christ.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Weekly Joys and Concerns</p>

