

January 6, 2018 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
Luke 10:25-37 Life Well Lived: In Serving by Andy McDonald

What a great day, and really what a great week! The church, that's us, the body of Christ outside of these walls, fully engaged in serving the people of our community. It has been great to hear the stories of your experiences.

This one event, Meet Worship Serve, captures in a brief, passing time of service, so much of the life of what God calls us to as church. He invites us to meet with one another. Whether it is just here on a Saturday morning, or in some circle during the week, there is a huge piece of church that is a call to gather.

We live in this world. Some of those we bump into each day, or whom we watch on TV, are not actively hostile to our being followers of Jesus. More and more there's a sense of, you do your thing and I'll do mine. We may encounter a live and let live attitude. But we also must recognize that there are forces of evil that are absolutely hostile to our walk with Jesus. We don't just wrestle with flesh and blood with principalities and powers of wickedness in high places. And just the grind of daily life seasoned with the news and entertainment and people who would pull us away from following Jesus, it is important for us to gather and encourage one another.

When I've faced things that have challenged my faith and made me question if I might be being naïve to follow Jesus, I need to meet with you. Some of you are very bright, good thinkers, you excel in the market place, or the family circle, some of you have gifts of wisdom, and knowing that you follow Jesus too, just the reality that smart wise engaged with the world people like you are part of the Body of Christ is an encouragement for me to keep following Jesus.

Beyond just meeting with people is why we meet. We come here to give back to God the best he has given to us. We remind ourselves and one another that we want God to be first and best in our lives. We sing his praise, we testify in song and scripture and spoken word that God is our God. In our best moments of worship we praise God without ever mentioning ourselves.

The buckets that hold our faith have holes in them and as much as we believe and say and sing of how great our God is, still the routine of just everyday life means some of that faith and confidence in God is leaking out and when we gather and meet, and not only meet but worship together our very experience of congregation acknowledgment of God and then hearing God's word shared combine to fill back up our buckets of faith. We are part of God's transformation of his will being done on earth as it is in heaven and being made more and more into the very likeness of Jesus. There's this great recognition of our need and of his great supply of Mercy that he pours out on us.

And then because we have been recipients of amazing grace and infinite mercy we, the church, redefine ourselves. We become ambassadors of God's kingdom. We each in our own way, uniquely gifted by God, we become partners in the great ministry of reconciliation. We move beyond these walls and fully engage in serving the people of our community.

Our current vision is to be "A church without walls fully engaged in serving the people of our community."

When we were processing and thinking and developing language for this vision for our church there was some push back. Questions about this vision missing anything about going into all the world. What about teaching both the valuable Biblical truths we have come to understand? What about our denomination's emphasis on health? Where's the evangelistic part of this vision.

In the ministry of Jesus Mark says Jesus went about "teaching" (more of what we think of as evangelism, and Luke says Jesus went about "doing good and healing."

A careful evaluation of Jesus' ministry reveals these lived out in constant combination. He would heal a person but never just to make them physically healthy because his purpose for them wasn't just a better life for their span of years on the planet, his ultimate goal was evangelistic, wholeness physically, mentally, spiritually for all eternity. He taught great lessons evangelistically but he wasn't just about a person's eternal joy, he took a little girl's hand and restored life serving her parent's and turning their sorrow into joy. I don't know all of what Jesus said on the hillside that day but at the end of the day he took a little boy's lunch and served a hillside supper because people were hungry.

Jesus told two stories that can help us grasp the inability to ever separate evangelism and social action or service.

These are probably two of his most famous stories and both are recorded in the gospel of Luke they are the parable we most commonly call the "Prodigal Son" in Luke 15 and the "Good Samaritan," in chapters 10.

In both of these parables there are tragic situations that are displeasing to God. John Stott writes: "God does not want human beings made in his image either to become demoralized and lost in a far country or to be assaulted and abandoned half-dead in the gutter. His desire is that both the lost and the battered be brought home."

Contemporary Christian p 346

These two parables demonstrate that Jesus concern is for both the sinning (the story of the prodigal) and the sinned against, (the one to whom the Samaritan brings aid).

In the parable of the prodigal there is rescue from alienation in a distant land, the boy repents, comes back home (a kind of salvation by faith in his father's love). In the story of the good Samaritan the victim can do nothing, the story gives him no roll in his rescue. He's presumably unconscious he owes his rescue to the charity of the Samaritan (here is a kind of salvation or rescue by the good works of the Samaritan)

Both of these parables have subplots which highlight the alternative to what is being commended.

The prodigal's older brother refuses to rejoice in his repentance and return and in the parable of the Samaritan the priest and Levite refuse to get involved in the battered man's plight, they refuse to serve.

Stott writes: "We might even say that those who resist the call to evangelism, and leave people alone in their sins, resemble the elder brother, while those who resist the call to social action, and leave people alone in their sufferings, resemble the priest and Levite who, 'passed by on the other side.'" Ibid. p. 347

Here are the two sides of this coin of being a follower of Jesus.

All of us can identify with the prodigal. If we are followers of Jesus Christ we acknowledge that at some point we “came home” for salvation. By the influence of the Holy Spirit we recognized our condition and faith in the Father’s love sparked in our hearts and we came home. I remember singing the words, “I’ve wandered far away from God, now I’m coming home.”

But the flip side is that the home of salvation is not just a cozy hang by the fire and sip our drink and share stories of our journey home, kind of place. We are saved to serve, and dare I say it, in our serving we work out our salvation.

We each, with no necessary intention, find identity with the prodigal. But God, in Jesus Christ is calling us to a life resembling the Good Samaritan.

At some point we all must come face to face with our sin. And if our response is repentance and confession and a turning away from sin, there is a corresponding turning to the world’s suffering. We receive the mercy of God and then having been shown mercy we show it to others in service. This is why service and evangelism are inextricably linked. Jesus’ very evangelization of this world is captured when he explains to his followers, “I did not come to be served but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many.”

And now the rescued, us, we become rescuers, and sometimes in rare moments of forthrightness we share words that transform, but much more likely, or certainly preceding words are actions. Hungry stomachs deafen ears that might hear the gospel. Unjustly incarcerated people may have injustice screaming so loudly in their ears they can’t hear the gospel. The illiterate may wish to read for themselves the gospel story but are unable. Whether by choice or circumstances, whether by a series of tragedies or pushed their by evil people, there are victims who need the attention of Samaritans like the one in Jesus’s story.

We sometimes simplify the service to just the rescue by the Samaritan of the guy who was robbed. But it may be that ridding that road of robbers could be the continuation of the Samaritan’s service.

In the book Ministry of Healing we are told that if we want people in God’s kingdom, if we want prodigals to come to themselves and head home to God, if we want beaten and battered victims of this world of sin to be in God’s eternal kingdom there is just one method that will bring true success.

There may be some other methods that might create momentary or short lived success but in this book the author suggest that only one method will bring true success in extending the ministry of Christ to reach people, and that is Christ’s method. What did he do? Here we have whom we believe to be God in human flesh, God incarnate, the perfection of Jesus, what did he do.

He mingled, he hung out with people, but he didn’t just hangout, he did it with a certain attitude. There was this atmosphere around him that he was interested in people’s best good. He wasn’t just hanging out for the benefits he enjoyed by hanging out by mingling, he wanted what was in their best interest to receive, he desired their good. He showed his sympathy for them. He listened to their stories. He didn’t condemn them or criticize them, but he sympathized with them.

Then he served them he ministered to their needs. And in the serving, with a clear attitude that he want their good, that it was all about them and meeting their needs, he won the people's confidence. And then in the safety of that relationship he would invite them to follow him.

If we think of evangelism as winning people to our tribe of Christianity then both our mission and vision are out of wack. But if we believe evangelism is about creating followers of Jesus than I believe we are on target.

Our mission to love people into a lifelong friendship with God is the ministry of reconciliation. We love people and share with them that Jesus has reconciled all things unto himself and to the Father.

Our vision is a means to accomplishing our mission as we become more and more a church without walls fully engaged in serving the people in our community, each of us serving the people in our circles of influence.

Serving is the right response for the prodigal come home. Evangelism results in the service of love. And Serving others opens the door, clears the channel in those served so the gospel can be heard and so service results in evangelism.

And what happens to us on this journey.

EVERY time we act in some self-sacrificing way for the good of others is a move toward being like Jesus.

That's who Jesus is the one who was rich and who for your sake became poor so that you might be rich.

For us to have a life well lived is to let go of self-serving and serve others.

Having received grace puts us in debt to all those who haven't .

Grace is so amazing in our lives that we should be willing to make any sacrifice that others might share this joy. So we tell the story and we seek to make the world a better place for our time here.

This is what Jesus wants us to be doing, because it's the only way to grow in grace. He invites you and me to a life well lived by engaging, to the extent of our ability, in helping and blessing those who need the help we can give them.

I believe that God wants to do amazing things, greater things beyond what we can ask or even imagine as we allow him to really make us a church without walls fully engaged in serving the people of our community, and in our serving we will discover a life well lived.



What is your best memory of giving service to others?

What was one of your most difficult service experiences?

When you think of evangelism what comes to mind or how would you define it?

What do you see as the relationship between evangelization and service?

In the parable of the Prodigal Son what do you think he was like on the morning after his welcome home party?

If you were the older brother why would it be hard to celebrate?

Why do you think the Samaritan stopped to help ?

Would it be legitimate Christian service to lobby for making the road where he was robbed safer?

How can you hangout wanting the best for people, sympathize with them, meet their needs, and then invite them to follow Jesus?

What do you think about serving others as the primary way to grow in grace?



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