



SERVE JOYFULLY -FIND THE JOY-

CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... in honor of Happy Gilmore 2 and our topic today of joy, where's your happy place? Is it the vacation cabin on the lake that your family used to spend weekends at when you were a kid? Is it a quiet room in your home that is your "spot," the center of your universe? Maybe it's the buffet at the Golden Coral... where else can you get tacos, ribs, stir fry, and a chocolate fountain? Discuss!

OPENING PRAYER

God of all Joy, thank you for the gifts you've given us with which to serve, and help us to put them into practice with joy.

INTRODUCTION

With a panini-full stomach and a humility-filled heart, you continue your stroll, heading to the park across from the

sandwich shop. The question of how to put *bold love* into practice was somewhat answered in your mind; that is, we must begin by adopting the humble attitude that Christ displayed in washing the disciples' feet. Bold love calls us to serve and to become a servant of all. At that very moment, you see a young mother struggling to pick up the trash her toddler is unabashedly scattering around their picnic site while at the same time balancing a fidgety, fussy infant on her hip. You also see nearby park-goers staring, whispering, glaring, obviously frustrated with this interruption to their afternoon. "Aww, poor thing," you think. "Why are these people just staring and not going to help her?" Right on cue, the image of Jesus filling a basin and washing the disciples' feet flashes into your mind, and you realize... you *are* one of the people staring at her and not going to help. Spurred on by a twinge of guilt, you force a smile, walk over, and start collecting trash... not the most pleasant of activities, but, Jesus said to do it... so, begrudgingly, you do it. The mother thanks you profusely, revealing vague details about how hard life has been lately and how they just needed an afternoon of fun in the park. A game spontaneously begins between you and the toddler of who can pick up the most trash and take it to the bin the fastest. You hold the baby for a moment so the mother can fold their blanket, commit one more twin slam dunk of goldfish wrappers in the trash with the toddler, return the infant, and hand the now-slightly-less-frazzled parent her picnic basket. As she walks away, you find yourself smiling. Maybe this serving thing isn't so bad... in fact, it might have even brought you a pinch of joy.

Setup Question: How likely are you to be the person who goes to help the mom in this scenario? Do you tend to go out of your way to assist in a situation like this? Or do you let folks typically handle things on their own? Or, are you more likely to be the mom, falling apart, in need of help?

SETUP

Well, folks, this is week 2 of series 2, which means... it's halftime! Let's recap why we're doing this. Whether you're new to this Christ-following thing, or have been a Christian for a long time, it's good to answer the question "what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus Christ?" What do we do? How do we act? Can we still watch a Halloween marathon or is just The Chosen from here out? To help us answer that question, we've been breaking down a vision statement released to us by the United Methodist Council of Bishops. We already had a *mission* statement, "To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." But our Bishops wanted to answer the follow-up questions, "what makes a disciple and what does that transformation look like?" And so, they came up with this...

**The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who,
empowered by the Holy Spirit,**

**LOVE BOLDLY, SERVE JOYFULLY
AND LEAD COURAGEOUSLY
in local communities and worldwide connections.**

We began with *loving boldly*, as did the Council of Bishops, because Jesus did, too. But loving like Jesus did is more than just being nice and doing nice things. The radical, revolutionary love to which Jesus calls us includes sacrifice, commitment, building relationships, loving God and ourselves, and thus makes the world take notice. Then last week, we moved to the second characteristic of a disciple. And we looked at the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet, a beautiful act of service, to explore how we put bold love into practice. We discovered that in calling us to serve, Jesus calls us to have the humble attitude he displayed in everything he did. Bold love calls us to serve, and to serve humbly.

Question 1: How did you do with adopting the humble attitude of Christ this week? Were you looking for ways to serve? How did it go?

SCRIPTURE

So, where do we go from here? Well, the Bishops and Jesus didn't make this one easy for us either. Just like *loving like Jesus did* means more than just being nice, *serving like Jesus did* means more than begrudgingly helping others. We often go through every reason we can to *not* help in a situation. "I'm too busy to help you move." "I need *my* money more than my co-worker's stupid charity does." "That neighbor lets his dog poop in my yard every day, I'm not giving him his walker back." (Okay, that may be a little extreme, but you get the point.) But, because we're not awful people, we take the time to carry a couch. We give the co-worker a \$20 for Rest Leg Syndrome. And

we return the neighbor's walker, (along with a box of doggie poop bags so he might get the hint. Passive-aggressive? Just a little.) We often fight the type of servant's attitude to which Jesus calls us. But both Jesus and our bishops knew that begrudging assistance doesn't exemplify the heart of God, so they both added something. Jesus, after displaying this awesome act of service and then speaking for 4 chapters about love, gives us this gem...

Read John, chapter 15, verse 11.

Bold love calls us to serve. And when you serve from that place of love, Jesus says your *joy* is supposed to overflow, (which is with our bishops added the word "joyfully" to this characteristic.) We are to serve *joyfully*.

Question 2: When faced with a situation where a little voice whispers in your ear, "you need to help that person," are you more likely to do it joyfully or begrudgingly? What keeps you from serving joyfully? Is it busy-ness? Is it a focus on your own "to do" list? What would make serving others more joyful for you?

So, how do we add the joy back into service? Well, for that we need to look a little closer at one of the sets of feet that Jesus washed that night... or at least their owner, Simon Peter. See, we left out a part of the story from last week. After Jesus fills the basin, he begins to wash the disciples' feet. When he gets to Peter, Peter protests, "I'm not worthy for you to wash my feet, I

won't let you do it." And Jesus responds, "if you don't let me do this, you don't belong with me." So, Peter, (either cracking a joke, or just being dramatic,) responds, "fine, then wash my hands and head, as well!"

But Peter learns something that day about how serious Jesus was about being a servant of all. And we know he understood it because, if we fast-forward a few years, to the letters he wrote to the churches he helped start, we see echoes of what Jesus taught him that night. Let's take a look.

Read 1 Peter, chapter 4, verses 8 through 10.

See? Simon Peter got it! (If you know anything else about his story, this is quite the accomplishment. He's a little hard-headed and clueless most of his time with Jesus. But man, he really tries.) In just these three verses, Peter starts with love, follows up with a call to humble service, and then finishes with a tip on how to bring the joy back.

Question 2: Consider this scripture from Simon Peter. What stands out to you? Does it provide a helpful perspective on serving? How would you have felt were you one of those reading this letter at the time?

REFLECTION

The Greek for verse 9 says, "be hospitable without grumbling." That doesn't fit well on a t-shirt, so we'll just paraphrase, "serve joyfully!" And this comes from the guy who wouldn't let Jesus

wash his feet. Quite the turnaround. But Peter takes it a step further. He gives a tip on how to put the joy back in service. He says, “God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.” (v.10 NLT) Bold love and joyful service right there in one passage... it’s almost like we plan these things.

But this is the point, and what Peter is trying to get across to his churches. Love calls us to serve. Service should be done joyfully. And you serve best when you are serving out of your God-given spiritual gifts. If you want to put the joy back into acts of service, figure out your spiritual gifts, and do that. Not everyone has the gift of generosity, so dropping a \$20 for Rest Leg Syndrome might not be your jam. But pushing for legislation to fight for the marginalized might just be your cup of tea. You might not be able to pick up trash on the side of the highway, but working with single mothers to help provide for their families could be right up your alley. When you find the intersection of your abilities, your passion, and the thing that produces good fruit, you light up and your joy overflows. Finding your spiritual gifts is beyond the purview of this guide, but you can use any number of online tests to discover yours. But if you want to bring joy back into service, discover and serve out of your spiritual gifts. And you’ll overflow with joy.

Question 3: Part 1) Have you taken a spiritual gifts survey? Do you know what your gifts are? Pastor Mike has led us through a process of spiritual gift discovery that included finding the intersection between your abilities, your

passion, and the thing that produces fruit. That is, what is something you're good at, that you also really enjoy doing, and that you see good results from when you do it? That's a spiritual gift.

Part 2) Think of one practical way you can use your spiritual gift to serve others this week, and see if it brings you joy.

CLOSING

If you're finding that serving just doesn't bring you joy right now, reset the mechanism. Go back to your spiritual gifts and do that. Because when you do, it builds joy within you. Peter knew this. It's why, in our scripture, he goes straight from love to service to gifts... because when you follow this progression, the joy overflows. That is your challenge for this week, ask yourself, "what are my spiritual gifts and am I using them?" And then, find a way this week to put them into practice. Because when you do, you find joy, maybe even a joy that overflows.

Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations and close in prayer.