

**Midweek Lenten Service**  
**April 10, 2019**  
**Titus 2:11-14**

*“The Disciplines of Lent: Love with Service”*

So we've come to our final midweek Lenten service. Next week is Holy Week and we enter into the mystery and wonder of our Savior's passing over from death to life. As we've walked this Lenten road, we have focused on what we as Jesus' disciples do as we follow Jesus: our Baptismal identity in Jesus, prayer, fasting, loving others with money, and now what it means to love others with service. These are disciplines of this Lenten season. Those two words – disciple and discipline – are formed from the same root word. A disciple is the student or follower of Jesus, and the discipline is the training that strengthens and builds up the disciple. All of these Lenten disciplines have been used by countless disciples of Jesus before us, and we follow in their train. Tonight, we focus on that Lenten discipline of loving by serving. To put ourselves at the disposal of others, to offer ourselves, our time, and our possessions, in service to others, as Christ offered himself for us, is what it means to love with service. May the Lord's rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus' sake.

**“... A people of his own possession who are zealous for good works”** (Titus 2:14b). That's us, but how zealous are we for good works? Well, let's just take a look at what the Body of Christ has been doing in this department since the first of the year. Each week, Monday-Friday, the mission field of our Early Childhood Education Center (ECEC) shares the love of Jesus with young children and their families. On the first Sunday of each month, we collect non-perishable food items, cleaning supplies, and personal care products for Koinonia to help those in need in our community. In January, we helped some of the Aljamous family to relocate to Ohio and make a new start there, while still helping the three young adult members of the family who have remained here. In late January, we partnered with St. Mark's Lutheran Church for their Hypothermia Shelter to help feed and house those who are homeless. In early February, we transformed this Fellowship Hall into a meal packaging assembly line with Rise Against Hunger. On Super Bowl weekend, we contributed to the Souper Bowl of Caring to address hunger issues. Also in early February, we sent a servant team to Haiti who did things like leading Vacation Bible School, helped with projects at the Village of Hope School, sorted meds for the Village of Hope Clinic, and other tasks. In mid-February, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes started up to help immigrant neighbors in our community learn English. In February, and every other month, a team of people from our congregation serves lunch to homeless people at Carpenter's Shelter. Since the first of the year, our Helping Hands Fund has distributed financial support to members in need. Creative Fellowship worked to provide 12 quilts, 12 new baby kits, 12 school kits, and 12 clean-up buckets for Lutheran World Relief and Church World Services, all of which were delivered only yesterday. That's a lot, and all of this in just the first quarter of this year. And the list goes on. All of these good works come as a response to what God in Christ has done for us, as we love others by serving them.

Our model here is what Jesus did on the night of his betrayal, as recorded in John's Gospel (John 13:1ff.). John does not record the institution of the Lord's Supper, but he does record that Jesus **“... rose from supper... laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him”** (John 13:4-5). Peter didn't want him to do this, and balked at having Jesus wash his feet. We probably would have, too. You see, it's hard to be on the receiving end of serving. We all like to be the one doing the serving. It makes us feel like we're making a difference; like we're doing concrete good in another person's life. But what's it like to be the one being served? It's very humbling, to say the least. But in speaking to Peter, Jesus speaks to all of us: **“If I do not wash you, you have no share with me”** (John 13:8). We have no part in Jesus unless we allow him to wash us. We have no part in Jesus unless we are on the receiving end of his humble and loving service, which culminated in his

suffering and death upon the cross. The thanks we give to Jesus for this is to love and serve others as he himself has loved and served us. Sometimes this means rolling up our sleeves, getting our hands dirty, and doing whatever serving needs to be done for the sake of our neighbor, whom we are to see as Christ in our midst. Sometimes this means allowing others to love and serve us. It's both/and, not either/or.

Loving by serving is both individual and communal. All of those examples I gave earlier are communal works of love that we have done as a congregation, or at least by groups within our congregation. What about individual works of love? Sometimes we can plan for these and build them into our calendar. But sometimes these just happen. All of a sudden, the need is right there before us, and it wasn't on our agenda for this particular day. Then what? What do we do then? The classic example of this is Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). The people you'd expect to render help to the man in need all passed by and went on their way. The person you wouldn't expect to render help is the one who did. And if we look at what Jesus tells us, the Good Samaritan went to considerable trouble and expense to do what he did. Nobody asked him to do this. Nobody expected him to do this. He felt called to do so, and that calling came from God himself. In all likelihood, he had places to go, people to see, and things to do, but whatever he had on his calendar got overtaken by the need that was before him. He tended to the injured man himself. He took him to an inn and paid for it out of his own pocket. He instructed the innkeeper to put whatever other expenses he might incur on his tab, and he'd pay for it next time he came around. He didn't do this to be thanked, or for any kind of recognition. He did it because it was the right thing to do. And it still is the right thing to do today. That is a work of love; that is loving by serving.

When all is said and done, our loving and our serving are imperfect at best. When the need is before us, we don't always say, "**Here am I! Send me**" (Isaiah 6:8). We get concerned about our schedule and how this is going to mess up our day. We turn in on ourselves and become self-absorbed. Especially then, God calls us to do an about-face; to repent, remember, and hold fast to him who "**came not to be served, but to serve, and to offer his life as a ransom for many**" (Mark 10:45). We come to Jesus who loved us literally to death; who has "**borne our griefs and carried our sorrows... [who] was pierced for our transgressions [and] crushed for our iniquities... and with his wounds we are healed**" (Isaiah 53:4-5). May this same Jesus move us to see the world around us, and the needs of those around us, through his redeeming eyes, and love by serving. Amen.