

John 13:1-18
The Serving Life

This morning we are continuing our series “The Good Life” We’re looking at what it means to have really full and complete life in Christ. Two weeks ago Jonathan walked us through what it looks like to have our lives centered in communion with Christ. This week we are going to continue to center our lives around Christ by looking at Christ’s example of service and see how we are called too serve. We’ll be talking about service in a vey broad sense this morning. When we talk about service we aren’t talking about serving in Kids life or joining in on the meal rotation for your city group, though those are service, and you should all be doing that. When we talk about service we are talking about the opportunity to sacrifice your own desires and time by putting someone needs before your own.

Before getting into the passage, I want to pause and praise God for you, the people of City Life. This church is a serving church. This church has grown so much over the years in serving one another and the city. In one of the south City Groups there’s a foster family, and people in their city groups, have gone through background checks, fingerprinting, and documentation so they can babysit for this family. How cool is that!?! Some of us know how hard it can be to find babysitters, but these people volunteered even when government bureaucracy was involved. A few weeks ago we saw 11 new deacons commissioned. These are people who have gone through classes, character assessments, and have added an extra weekend meeting to their monthly schedule because they want to help lead the church in meeting the needs of the church and the city! We have the most volunteers we’ve ever had in kids life, we have a solid 4-5 week rotation now! Some of you remember when it was an every other week rotation. Some other awesome things Brandy and Robie have been celebrating in kids life is the lack of last minute cancellations, and the way volunteers have been looking for ways to help improve things, not as critics but as problem solvers. The create and restore team is on fire every week sweating for Jesus. We have four guys who serve joyfully on the sound team, which if you know any thing about church sounds teams is a bit of an anomaly, both the amount of sound guys, and the joy in which they serve. Our neighborhood churches serve the physically and emotionally in need at Hope Street and The Austin Children’s Shelter. In the north, someone has opened their home for a family who moved here to Austin and need somewhere to stay while they found a more permanent home. There are stories on stories of people serving the church and the city through benefit concerts, meals, yard work. I could spend the whole morning sharing stories.

The servant-heartedness of this church has grown so much over the years as we’ve grown in the gospel of grace. This morning I want us to ask how we can sustain a life of service. As a church, and as individuals we are very Austin in our service. We do a lot. Which is great. But heres the truth we heard two weeks ago from Jonathan, when we lack communion with God, when we are not centered in Christ, its possible to do a lot for Jesus, without Jesus. Its actually possible to do good things while serving the wrong god. How do we know if we are serving the right God? The god we serve is actually revealed by the questions, or fears that arise when we are asked to serve. We all know, if we are being honest, that there are obstacles to serving, we all have reasons

for not serving or hesitating to serve. These questions or objections are what slowly overtime will erode our service to one another and the city.

When you are presented with the chance to serve What are some of the objections that come to mind when you are asked to babysit, provide a meal, help someone move, or counsel someone in your City Group? When asked to serve we often respond with one, or a combination of the following objections: I feel like I “have to” instead of “I get to” so I don’t find joy in it, its something I’ll get around to. Serving steals my me time. I’ve been burned out before by serving. If I serve, it will compromise my drive to succeed. I can’t miss out on the “scene” to serve. These objections reveal who we are really serving don’t they? These objections all put “me” in the center don’t they? This is nothing new. Jesus’ disciples struggled with these very things. In the story we are looking at this morning we are going to see that they didn’t serve well because they served the wrong things. And we’ll see how Jesus sets us free from our objections so we can freely serve.

It was the eve of the death of Jesus. It was the night Jesus would be betrayed. He had gathered with his disciples in a rented spare room to celebrate the Passover feast. The passover feast was a celebration and remembrance of the mighty work God had done in delivering His chosen people from crushing slavery. It celebrated and remembered God’s unending faithfulness to the people of Israel, as throughout history, he repeatedly brought them out of slavery and exile. It celebrated and anticipated the very thing Jesus would do in the coming days: defeat sin, which is exile from God and slavery to something else, and reconcile his people to himself. We are told that Jesus was confident, secure, in what was about to happen to him because he knew that he was sent by God the Father, and that the Father “had given all things into his hands.” Jesus was confident and secure because he knew the father had sent him to serve, and had given him authority. He knew he was servant and king. So the servant king, who will very soon conquer death through death, is sitting around a table with his twelve closest friends. These are the men Jesus has been preparing to continue his work of reconciliation when he returns to the father. These are the men who should continue his service to the world, but where has their conversation turned? We are told by a parallel account in Luke that once again, the conversation has turned to who would be remembered as the one who is greatest among them. Tax collectors, fishermen, and betrayer sit before the Son of God and clamor for supremacy when they should bow in worship. They have completely missed the foreshadowing of the passover meal, and what Jesus is telling them through it, because they are to concerned with *position*. They are ignoring the gospel in front of them because they care to much for success. What does Jesus do to correct them? Does he humiliate them by shouting them down, beating them with his words until they learn their proper place? Does he storm off in anger abandoning them to their insecurity? Or does he sit back and passively allow them to continue on in their self-destruction? No what Jesus does sucks the air right out of the room and stuns the disciples into silence.

To understand the weight of what Jesus is about to do we need to understand the infrastructure of Jerusalem. In Israel there weren’t paved roads, there were dirt roads. And animals, camels, donkeys, horses, etc were widely used. So when you combine those two things, along with sandals, which were commonly worn, hat you end up with is a lot of people with very dirty feet. You couldn’t go anywhere without getting your feet

dirty. So when you would enter a house there would be a basin filled with water, and a **servant** or low ranking member of the family would come, kneel before you, and by hand wash the dirt, and whatever else was mixed in with it off of your feet. Not a particularly pleasant job.

The twelve disciples had no servants. I wonder if their argument over who was greatest in the kingdom had grown out of an argument over who should have to take on the role of a servant, and wash the others feet. But no one had humbled themselves and washed the feet of the other disciples, instead, I guess, they had all just sat down at the table unwashed, continuing in their argument over who was greatest. And it instead of a verbal rebuke Jesus stands up and walks over to the basin of water. He removes his outer clothes, leaving just a loin cloth, the uniform of a servant at this time, wraps a towel around his waist, picks up the basin and begins to wash the feet of his disciples. As he works his way through the disciples no one speaks. On his knees, he washes the feet of those who he has loved, those who have grumbled, those who have doubted. He washes the feet of Judas, the very feet that in minutes will run to betray him to his enemy. He then moves to wash the feet of Peter. But Peter, as usual, thinks he knows better than Jesus and so he cannot keep his mouth shut. First Peter asks, bewildered, Jesus are you really going to wash my feet?, Jesus replies “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand”. This isn’t enough for Peter so He loudly objects,, “You’ll never wash my feet!” thinking that he didn’t need to be served by Jesus, or that all his questions must be answered before Jesus can serve him. Jesus replies “ If I do not wash you, you have no share with me”. Peter thinking that his place of influence or power in the kingdom is in danger of being taken away, tries to over compensate. “Well then don’t just wash my feet, wash my head wash my hands!” Jesus responds, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” This exchange shows us that we may not estimate our need very well (don’t wash me) or that we overestimate our value (wash all of me). The under zealous and overzealous Christian is so self focused they miss the whole point—Jesus. Jesus then washes Peter and the remaining disciples feet. As he rises from the last disciple, dressed only in a loin cloth and a towel covered with all the dirt and filth their feet had been carrying, he returns the basin to its place, puts on his outer garments, sits down at the table and asks “Do you understand what I have done to you?” After watching the exchange with Peter no one breaks the silence. Jesus continues to explain. “You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’”

The disciples didn’t understand who Jesus was and so they didn’t understand who they were. They called him Lord and Teacher, but they did not obey him or follow him in service. Instead they looked to be served. But Jesus, the night before he would be killed, chooses to “love them to the end” by transforming them through his service. He doesn’t start by telling them how to be more servant hearted, instead he begins by

doing something to them, something they don't deserve. When Jesus washes the feet of the disciples they are given a beautiful picture of the gospel, a foretaste of Christ's death and resurrection. Jesus humbles himself, taking the form of a servant, and removes their filth, and wears it for them. And out of his service to them Jesus calls them to serve one another. He answers the quest for success by showing them that to be great in the kingdom of God means to be a servant. No servant is above his master, no messenger greater than the one who sends him. And then Jesus promises them that doing what he has commanded is a blessing! Jesus knows that service is the best thing for them, its what they are created for. Jesus knows that all these other pursuits of theirs and ours, success, me time, being at the right events, in the right circles, avoiding service because of previous burnout is not freedom, its slavery. Every one of those tiny gods is a cruel god. Jesus knows if the disciples keep pursuing position over one another, instead of service to one another they will implode, personally and as a group. And this could happen to us City Life. Jesus calls the disciples and us to service because it was better for them, is better for us, and as his people it is what we are made for. Jesus' service to us in his life, death, and resurrection, remakes us into servants, it changes our core identity. Our problem is the same as the disciples, we don't live like Jesus is a servant King, like he is Lord and Teacher. We either live like he is just a demanding boss, or just a good example. We are just like the disciples, we call him lord and teacher, but our objections, our pursuits show that something else is Lord and Teacher.

Jesus says "I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you". Jesus, graciously demonstrates what a true servant looks like. Lets look at the story again and see how it answers our objections to service.

Our first objection was that when are presented with the chance to serve others, we don't want to because there is a lack of joy in it because you feel you "have to" instead of you "get to". Our objection reveals our true desire: We only want to serve if we can get something, in this case joy or fulfillment, out of it. This objection is entirely self-focused right? Its not really service, its an investment. If I put in something I expect to receive. I give to get and service isn't really giving me anything. But the problem here is that we are looking to find our fulfillment and joy in something other than Christ. The gospel is the good news that we have been served and blessed perfectly in Christ. Our service flows out of that joy and freedom, not alongside or in addition to it! Service is not a chance to find joy apart from Christ, it is instead the opportunity to express the joy you have in Christ to others through love and sacrifice. One way this objection appears in our church, is the hesitation some exhibit to get involved in a Fight Club or City Group. Maybe you look at Fight Clubs or City Groups as a "good thing" you should do when you have time or your schedule opens up. Its not a priority in you list of personal needs. But instead of looking at it from the angle of your needs, what if you considered the needs of the fight club or city group. Have you ever considered that they need you? your City Group needs you, not just to add another dish to the weekly meal, or jump in on the childcare rotation. They need you to be an active pat of their sanctification, their becoming more like Christ. They need you there to ask them tough questions, to pray for them, to share your story and hear their story. Sometimes we don't think we have anything spiritual to offer others because we are not used to offering anything. God has made us for one another, and God chooses to work through each other. And in the story

we see that Jesus promises this is a great blessing. Our joy in service should come from Jesus, not from the serving of others, and sometimes we have to really fight for this. But Jesus has promised us that there is blessing in service.

Our second objection was that serving others cuts into our “me time”. In the story do we see Jesus having any concept of “me time”? Now earlier in the gospels we see that Jesus spends time alone to be refreshed by God, but he does it so that he is able to continue serving others. And “me time” isn’t really the same thing is it? Jesus’ rest doesn’t involve 3 hours of Netflix or Pinterest, over indulging in eating or alcohol, or avoiding difficult people. What does Jesus do on the last night before his death? He has a party with and washes the feet of his disciples. And these disciples include stubborn, difficult, always-make-it-awkward, Peter, and Judas, the man who will betray him to death. Makes no sense right. If it was me, and I was spending my last night on earth I would not invite the man who was going to kill me, let alone wash his feet. If I was Jesus, I would have at least given Judas the wrong address right? If Jesus is just concerned with his me time then why would he invite Judas? Or Peter, the guy who always says the wrong thing? No we are told that Jesus “loved them to the end”

Husbands and father’s I think that “me time” is a particular temptation for us. We work all day, some of us doing jobs we don’t like, some working for bosses we don’t like, and all working, which is hard. And when we come home we can “re-enter” in a really unhealthy way. We can re-enter with ridiculous expectations that dinner will be perfect, the house will be perfect, and our kids will be perfect. And then we open the door and are hit with reality. We come home expecting our kingdom to be in order, free of any conflict or crossing of our wills, and that there will be a red carpet rolled out from the door to our recliner where our steak dinner awaits. I know that’s a little extreme, but many of us come home as kings expecting to be served, instead of as servants looking to bless their families. And when we do that what have we brought home to our wives? I know this sounds harsh, but it’s father’s day so...., when you come home with that kind of attitude and those expectations, you are just bringing home another child for your wife to take care of. She’s already spent her whole day with kids clamoring to be king. And our expectation of me time, or a conflict, service free home, is childish. Now this isn’t some chest pounding, macho call to MAN UP. You don’t need to be more like a man, you need to be more like Jesus. Men, God has made you to serve, are you entering your home as Jesus began his meal with the disciples? Are you taking on the role of a servant. Are you looking to wash the feet (maybe literally) of your children? Are you actively looking for ways to serve your wife through encouragement, listening, washing dishes, and discipling kids? Are you showing your family the blessedness of being like Christ, how very good it is to be a servant? Are you experiencing the blessedness, the service of Christ, so that you can serve? Or are you looking for fulfillment in your own kingdom?

Me time is a myth, that builds our identity around ourselves, instead of building it around those we are called to serve: Christ, the church, and the city.

Our drive for success also stands in the way of us serving. Austin is an incredibly driven city, and we can view service as a roadblock to success. We can make career choices based on our personal goals or desires, instead of what is best for others and what serves the kingdom. What are Jesus’ goals in the story? He wants to see the disciples transformed, he “loves them to the end”. They are his primary focus. His

service is other focused. What if you asked some, rather unpopular, questions when you have to choose between success at work and service to refocus your goals through the gospel? Austin is a very transient city. If you get a job offer in another city, do you ask yourself if you should stay so that you can serve your city group? When you work long hours do you ask if its whats actually better for your family? These aren't popular questions but they can help realign our hearts with the gospel, because they realign us to be other focused. (example?) Jesus tell us that no servant is greater than their master. In your drive for success are you trying to be greater than Jesus? Are you pursuing a different kind of success than Jesus has called you too?

Lastly I want speak to those of you who are apprehensive about serving others because you have been burned out. Burn out can be very common, I've experienced it, many here in this church have as well. Maybe you didn't get the support you needed where you were serving. Maybe the people you were serving hurt you and betrayed you. Maybe you grew exhausted because you never saw results or people change. Maybe you served out of your own strength instead of the strength of Christ? Burn out is so hard because it often makes us confuse our hurt with our service. We can't think of one with out thinking of the other, and so the opportunity to serve can become an opportunity to fear. So first we need to recognize that the reason we got burned out, or the reason we got hurt, was not because we served. Jesus promises that serving others is a blessing, so we know that its not he actual serving of others that burned us out. Instead it could have been the way we served. I know for myself personally I experienced terrible burn out because I was serving out of ambition and my own strength. I wasn't serving to serve, I was serving to build my own kingdom. Maybe that was you too, maybe you became burned out because you were looking to get ultimate fulfillment from service instead of Christ. Maybe you became burned out because you, like Peter, did not let Jesus first serve you? I know I didn't. Maybe thats not why you were burned out, maybe you were betrayed or used by someone as you tried to serve. Jesus was too. The most amazing thing about this story is that Jesus washes the feet of Judas. He kneels before his betrayer, and washes off the dirt from his feet, the dirt that contained animal excrement and other filth. He serves the very person who would insure his death. Maybe you right now are thinking of someone who used you or hurt you like Judas hurt Jesus. This morning Jesus is calling you, to be a servant like him, to not consider yourself greater than your master, and wash the feet of your enemy by forgiving them. Don't let the hurt you experienced keep you from the blessing God gives in serving others. Don't let your identity be built around your burn out. Don't let that define you any more. Christ has defined you, he has given you the identity of BELOVED SERVANT. You are free to forgive because Jesus has washed your feet and worn your dirt, and beat your death. You are not your burnout. You are God's child. Jesus has "loved you to the end" even to the cross, even to death which is the ultimate burnout. Follow Christ, take up your cross, knowing that the same power that raised Christ from the dead lives inside you. He will heal you, raise you up, and restore what was taken in, Christ!

Christ is first the center of our joy and fulfillment. Look what he has done for you! Christ is the center of your service. All things are from him, to him, and through him. Let him be your Lord and Teacher. Not your fears or objections. Let Him be your lord and teacher, not your drive for success or burnout.

Matt Oakes

