

**Serving Like Jesus**  
**Mark 10:35-45**  
**New Philadelphia Moravian Church**  
**November 4, 2018**

Today is a different day at New Philadelphia. It is the first Sunday in over 30 years that Worth Green has not been the Senior Pastor of this congregation. And while I can't speak for all of you, I know that for me and for many people that I have spoken to, his retirement has caused a myriad of emotions.

We are happy for Worth on his well-deserved retirement and we know that God has said to him "Well done, good and faithful servant." We are grateful to God for sharing Worth with us for all of the years that he gave us his leadership- we have been blessed by his preaching and teaching, his care and concern. We are anxious about what the future of our congregation will be without Worth as our Senior Pastor. We are worried about things changing and not being what we have been used to for the last 30 years. Yet at the same time we are excited about the future for we know that God is with us. As so often happens, the Daily Text for today is especially appropriate- Paul wrote to the Ephesians "*I pray ... that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.*"

Christ does dwell in our hearts and we are rooted and grounded in love- for God, for each other, and for this congregation. As long as we hold on to this truth, and as long as we hold on to each other, no matter how uncertain we may feel in this moment, we can be certain that whatever our future is, whatever God has in store for the future of this congregation, we can be certain that God is already there. Preparing the way for us, waiting to welcome us into his future for us with open and loving arms.

In his sermon last week, his last sermon with us, and actually throughout his last several sermons, Worth challenged us to consider our hearts. To be certain that we have brave and searching hearts, broken yet believing hearts, and most important,

wide-open hearts. Over the past few weeks, we have done a wonderful job of honoring Worth and thanking him for his ministry among us. We can continue to do so by taking to heart his words and keeping our hearts wide-open to God and his leading.

Our hearts are wide open when we remember who gives us our heart, who it is who we are called to love with all of our heart, who calls us to use our hearts to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Our hearts are never more wide-open than they are when we allow ourselves to love like Jesus, to live like Jesus, and to serve like Jesus. Allowing God's blessings to flow from God to us and then from us to the world is the ultimate realization of having a wide-open heart. It opens up to take in God's love, and then it opens up to share God's love. As followers of Jesus, we are called to live with wide-open hearts.

One of the things that I remember from my New Testament classes in Seminary is about how the disciples are portrayed in the gospel of Mark. And it is not a flattering portrayal. Time after time after time, Mark has Jesus teaching something or doing something and the disciples totally missing the point. This request of James and John that we just read falls right in that category. When they ask Jesus to allow one of them to sit on his right and one to sit on his left in his glory, not only are they making an outlandish request, but they are also giving us a perfect example of having hearts that are wide-open but only to receive and not to give.

It occurs shortly after Jesus teaches them about what is going to happen to him- how he will be condemned and mocked and killed- and after Jesus tells the rich man to follow him that he must sell all that he has. They make their request of him even after hearing Jesus say that to receive the kingdom of God, they must enter it like a little child.

James and John make their outrageous request to him after Jesus tells them this: *“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell...”*

Talk about missing the point! After hearing some of the most difficult teachings of Jesus, after hearing all that they must do to follow and to serve Jesus, how they must be willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others, all that James and John seem to be concerned with is themselves, with securing their place of honor in the glorious kingdom. Jesus has just told them and shown them how hard it is to be his followers. And they are only concerned with their reward.

Those words that I just read are some of the most challenging that Jesus puts before his followers, and some of the most disturbing. Hanging a millstone around your neck and throwing yourself in the sea, cutting off our hands or feet, plucking out our eyes- these are not pleasant or happy images. They are not what we like to think of when it comes to Jesus.

We prefer the Jesus who says: "Let the little children come onto me." or "Blessed are the meek and the poor in spirit." We prefer the Jesus who feeds the hungry and heals the sick to the one who overturns tables and throws the money changers from the Temple. We get a little uncomfortable when we hear Jesus talking as he does or acting as he does when he gets angry.

It's easier and more comfortable to just ignore the harsh, angry Jesus. It's easier to just skip over those instances, those words. We like Jesus better without them, without all those rough edges, without him actually being "fully human." It's easier and more comfortable to worship and follow the resurrected Jesus, the "fully divine" Jesus. It is easier to relate to the Jesus who only gives and asks nothing of us. We like the Jesus who tells us to have wide-open hearts to receive all that he has to give to us much more than we like the Jesus who calls us to have wide-open hearts to serve others as he serves us.

It's easier, it's more comfortable but is it right? As much as we'd like to, we can't pick and choose which aspects of Jesus' life and ministry that we like best. We can't just focus on what we like, what we feel most comfortable with and ignore the parts we do not like, that make us uncomfortable. Jesus isn't a "cafeteria style" teacher, where we can pick and choose what we like and ignore what we don't. He's a full service Savior. And we have to take him as he is, not as we want him to be or try to make him to be. Even when he uses those harsh and vivid images of being thrown into the sea with a millstone around your neck, of cutting off your hands and feet, of tearing out your eye.

What Jesus is doing, the point he is making with these horrific images, is that sometimes we need to get out of the way. We need to stop worrying about ourselves and our places by Jesus' side. And start doing what Jesus himself did- not only allowing ourselves to be loved but to love others, not only allowing ourselves to be served but to serve others. Not keeping Jesus and his love for ourselves but sharing it with others, sharing it with all.

"If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me...." This is what we do every time that our hearts are open to receive but closed when we are asked to give. When all the blessings that flow from God to us just stop

right here and fail to flow from us to the world. And when we do it, we are getting in Jesus' way. We are saying that Jesus came to love us and love us alone, that he came to serve us and to serve us alone. And we become a stumbling block to the belief of others.

It is what happens when we are worried more about ourselves than about others. So what Jesus is saying when he asks James and John if they can “drink the cup” that he drinks or if they can be “baptized with the baptism” that he is baptized with, he is saying that if they can't do those things, then they just don't get it. He is telling them if they can't give as well as receive, if they can't serve just as they are served, then they really don't know what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

*But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

Today we begin our Stewardship focus. We are thinking about how all our blessings flow from God to us and from us to the world. We are being called to “serve like Jesus, to love like Jesus, to live like Jesus.” Clyde has already shared with you many of the upcoming ways we have to serve like Jesus through our 12 Days of Service. And you have received our Stewardship Brochure for this year too.

Take a look at this. It is about more than stewardship. It is a picture of who we are and what we do as the people of God at New Philadelphia Moravian Church. It is how we live like Jesus, love like Jesus, and serve like Jesus. And as you look over this, you can see that together we are doing great things in the name of God as we share his love and grace, with each other, with our community, and with our world. All the blessings that we celebrate in this pages and in this congregation flow from God to us

and from us to the world.

I'm sure that as you look over all of the great things we are doing together at NPMC that you will see some things listed here that you know all about, that you are involved in and committed to. And I am equally sure that there are some things in here that you look at and you say "Wow! I didn't know that we were doing that." The "we" is important.

Because that is what church is all about- it is about we. It is not about you, it is not about me. It is about we. It is about you and me together, it is about us- all of us and God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Just as God is three in one and one in three, we are many and we are one, we are one and we are many.

So as you consider your commitment to God and to this congregation, consider doing more for God. Consider giving more than you think you can give, consider doing more than you think you can do, consider being more than you think that you are. And then be who God created you to be. Because together we can give more, and do more, and be more. And we need each other for New Philadelphia to continue to do all of these great things to live like Jesus, love like Jesus, and serve like Jesus. We need each other so that all our blessings will continue to flow from God to us and from us to the world.

It all comes back to the basics, to what draws us to God and draws us together. And that is our love for God- with heart, soul, strength, mind; our belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior; and our love for each other as we are drawn together by the Holy Spirit. So let us keep our hearts wide open to continue to receive the love that God gives to us and we give to each other. Let us keep our hearts wide open to continue to share the love that God gives to us and we give to each other. God is calling us to share it with all the world.

