

“Servant Leadership”

The Rev. Drew Willard  
UCC at The Villages, FL  
October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016 ©  
20<sup>th</sup> Sun./Pentecost/  
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*Blessing of the Animals*

*2 Timothy 1:1-14*

*Luke 17:5-10*

*[Jesus said,]*

*Does [the householder] thank the servant  
because [they] did what was commanded?*

*So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say,*

*‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”*

*Luke 17:9-10*

Let us pray... O God,

Thank you for the privilege of the struggle to be your people in this time and place.

Grant that we find joy in learning more about you and your Kingdom.

Bless us in the shared task of caring for each other –

that we are all important regardless of our role in life and in this congregation.

Amen

The past few Sundays, the Gospel lessons have been about Jesus speaking  
to a large crowd, teaching with parables.

Now at the beginning of Luke 17, we are told that those who are in his audience  
are his ‘disciples’ and ‘apostles’.

Apparently, some of them had been landowners and people in authority  
who had servants or slaves.

This was evident when Jesus said,

<sup>7</sup>“Will any one of you, who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep, say to him  
when he has come in from the field,  
‘Come at once and sit down at table’?

<sup>8</sup> Will he not rather say to him,

‘Prepare supper for me, and gird yourself and serve me, till I eat and drink;  
and afterward you shall eat and drink’?

Luke 17:7-8

What is remarkable is that Jesus is telling them

to put themselves in a servant’s shoes,

because now they are servants in service to God...

It can be a rough business being in ministry –

like Jesus said in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5:11-12...

*“Blessed are you when [others] revile you and persecute you  
and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.*

*Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven,*

*for so [they] persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Willard, p.2

For his own example, Jesus took on the role of the Suffering Servant found in chapters 42, 49, 50, 52, and 53 of the Book of Isaiah.

[Isaiah 42:1–9; Isaiah 49:1–13; Isaiah 50:4–11; and Isaiah 52:13–53:12]

From Isaiah 42:1-4...

*Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights;  
I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.  
He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice...*

*He will not grow faint or be discouraged  
till he has established justice in the earth...*

From Isaiah 49:7...

*Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,  
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers:  
“Kings shall see and arise; princes[also], and they shall prostrate themselves;  
because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel,  
who has chosen you.”*

From Isaiah 50:7...

*But the Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced;  
therefore I have set my face like a flint,  
and I know that I shall not be put to shame.*

From Isaiah 53:4-5...

*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his wounds we are healed.*

When Jesus cries out from the cross,

“Eloi! Eloi, lama sabachthani!” “My God! My God, why have you forsaken me?”

These words can be found in the first verse of Psalm 22 –

It is as if Jesus is emboldening himself in the midst of his agony –

taking some shred of encouragement, some comfort despite the ordeal.

Suffering is part of the mantle of service to God

and the Holocaust against the Jewish people bears witness to this

and so do the countless people who have been persecuted throughout history and in our own time, for their religion.

But to be a servant is not all struggle and grief.

For a Christian, it really is its own reward.

Consider the Apostle Paul’s words of encouragement to

his protégé, Timothy, who eventually become bishop of the church at Ephesus.

Willard, p.3

<sup>3</sup>*Night and day I mention you in my prayers. I am always grateful for you,  
as I pray to the God my ancestors and I have served with a clear conscience.*

<sup>4</sup>*I remember how you cried, and I want to see you,  
because that will make me truly happy.*

<sup>5</sup>*I also remember the genuine faith of your mother Eunice.  
Your grandmother Lois had the same sort of faith,  
and I am sure that you have it as well.*

<sup>6</sup>*So I ask you to make full use of the gift that God gave you  
when I placed my hands on you. Use it well.*

<sup>7</sup>*God's Spirit doesn't make cowards out of us.  
The Spirit gives us power, love, and self-control.*

Being a Christian means having a life of purpose and relationship.  
To "love God" and "love others" means you are loved by God  
and loved by others, too.

Paul speaks of this interconnectedness as 'the Body of Christ'  
which Jesus called God's 'Kingdom of Heaven'.

Everybody has a role to play...

In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:16, Paul wrote,

*... if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,"  
that would not make it any less a part of the body.*

*If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing?*

*If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?*

In verse 21 on the other hand,

*The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you,"  
nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."*

He goes on to say in verses 24-26.

*God has so composed the body,  
giving the greater honor to the inferior part,  
that there may be no discord in the body,  
but that the members may have the same care for one another.*

*If one member suffers, all suffer together;  
if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

Perhaps you recognize the people on today's bulletin cover:

They are characters from the PBS-TV miniseries "Downton Abbey".

Pictured here are Mrs. Hughes the senior housekeeper, played by Phyllis Logan and  
Mr. Carson the head butler, played by Jim Carter.

They are the leaders among the servants

who manage the day to day affairs of this fictional hereditary estate  
called Downton Abbey.

Willard, p.4

This program is a TV serial that portrays a bygone era with a sympathetic view of the nobility upstairs and the working class help downstairs.

Caricatures and stereotypes of either social class give way to an empathetic perspective of both.

There are examples of the arrogant rich well represented, but also truly noble rich people as well.

There are resentful lower class workers on hand, but also truly noble servants as well.

There is all kinds of conniving imaginable going on, upstairs and downstairs, but so are extraordinary acts of generosity and mutual respect between the classes, especially as they were in the midst of an era of great change.

Their story begins just before WWI and continues into the era leading up to the Great Depression and WWII – heralding change and the end of the aristocracy.

It is a time of the Jazz Age, changing attitudes and prejudices about race and gender as well as social roles with new opportunities for upward mobility, and all the perils that implies – not unlike our own time.

The stern Mr. Carson is presented as a man who is comfortable in his role, not welcoming change, and committed to selfless service and tradition. He would echo Jesus' words.

*7 “Will any one of you, who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep, say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down at table’?*

*8 Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and gird yourself and serve me, till I eat and drink; and afterward you shall eat and drink’?*

*Luke 17:7-8*

That would be Mr. Carson pushing the younger servants to tow the line and look sharp doing it.

Mrs. Hughes is second in command and a worthy challenger to provide a counter perspective to Mr. Carson's unerring focus on tradition and duty, when need be, but always respectful and a team player.

It is no surprise that these two will become...

Uh-oh, no spoilers. You may want to see for yourself.

Willard, p.5

All manner of relationships are explored –

especially, the changing role for women in English society  
with regard to sexuality, pregnancy, and the workplace.

Also, the plight of being gay at a time when there were not even words  
for this topic to be discussed in polite conversation,  
was addressed in a sensitive and credible way.

Mr. Carson demonstrates true servant leadership,

but then so does Lord Grantham, the head of the family and heir to the estate.

Though his life of privilege is unable to alter the great changes underway,

he demonstrates determination to meet these challenges  
with humility and mutual admiration for the people  
who serve him and his family.

In the meantime, the women in both the lives of Lord Grantham and Mr. Carson  
rise to the occasion with hopeful anticipation for a better world.

When the Grantham family goes to London for an affair of state,  
the servants are given the day off.

Mr. Carson has planned a day full of cultural events to include visits to the museum,  
but seeing the younger servants' eyes glaze over at this,  
Mrs. Hughes prevails upon Mr. Carson to take their holiday at the beach.

The image on today's bulletin cover is that scene where

Mrs. Hughes takes Mr. Carson by the hand as they go together  
into the uncertain waters ahead.

The servants and the aristocratic family of this estate are alternately  
humbled and strengthened as they work together to maintain  
their household together.

So, it is with Christian community,

that as we seek to show love to God and one another,

we go forth with a life of purpose and in relationship together  
even into the midst of uncertain waters.

Amen

*Our first lesson today comes from 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 1:1-14  
in which the Apostle Paul sends a word of encouragement  
as Timothy's mentor to proclaim the message of the Gospel –  
the Good News of God's redeeming love through Christ...*

- <sup>1</sup>From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. God himself chose me to be an apostle,  
and he gave me the promised life that Jesus Christ makes possible.
- <sup>2</sup>Timothy, you are like a dear child to me.  
I pray that God our Father and our Lord Christ Jesus  
will be kind and merciful to you and will bless you with peace!
- <sup>3</sup>Night and day I mention you in my prayers. I am always grateful for you,  
as I pray to the God my ancestors and I have served with a clear conscience.
- <sup>4</sup>I remember how you cried, and I want to see you,  
because that will make me truly happy.
- <sup>5</sup>I also remember the genuine faith of your mother Eunice.  
Your grandmother Lois had the same sort of faith,  
and I am sure that you have it as well.
- <sup>6</sup>So I ask you to make full use of the gift that God gave you  
when I placed my hands on you. Use it well.
- <sup>7</sup>God's Spirit doesn't make cowards out of us.  
The Spirit gives us power, love, and self-control.
- <sup>8</sup>Don't be ashamed to speak for our Lord.  
And don't be ashamed of me, just because I am in jail for serving him.  
Use the power that comes from God and join with me  
in suffering for telling the good news.
- <sup>9</sup>God saved us and chose us to be his holy people.  
We did nothing to deserve this, but God planned it because he is so kind.  
Even before time began God planned for Christ Jesus  
to show kindness to us.
- <sup>10</sup>Now Christ Jesus has come to show us the kindness of God.  
Christ our Savior defeated death and brought us the good news.  
It shines like a light and offers life that never ends.
- <sup>11</sup>My work is to be a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher.  
<sup>12</sup>That's why I am suffering now.  
But I am not ashamed!  
I know the one I have faith in, and I am sure that he can guard  
until the last day what he has trusted me with.
- <sup>13</sup>Now follow the example of the correct teaching I gave you,  
and let the faith and love of Christ Jesus be your model.
- <sup>14</sup>You have been trusted with a wonderful treasure.  
Guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit, who lives within you.

*Let us be challenged and guided by these words...*

*Luke 17:5-10*

5 The apostles said to the Lord,

“Increase our faith!”

6 And the Lord said,

“If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamine tree,  
‘Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.

7 “Will any one of you, who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep, say to him  
when he has come in from the field,  
‘Come at once and sit down at table’?

8 Will he not rather say to him,

‘Prepare supper for me, and gird yourself and serve me, till I eat and drink;  
and afterward you shall eat and drink’?

9 Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded?

10 So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say,  
‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”

*Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights;  
I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.  
He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;  
a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;  
he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged  
till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.  
Isaiah 42:1-4*

Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,  
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers:  
“Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves;  
because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”  
*Isaiah 49:7*

But the Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced;  
therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.  
*Isaiah 50:7*

*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.  
Isaiah 53:4-5*