

## Through Servants Eyes

When our bishop ordained our pal Mark Haworth last Saturday, the gist of his entire sermon was that becoming a priest doesn't make you the big shot on campus — but rather — becoming ordained makes you the servant of everyone.

Now on the one hand, I think we all kind of get that in some kind of weird intellectual way, but practically speaking, almost nobody really believes it.

And I think that's true whether you're ordained or not.

Our friend Kekapa Lee retires this week as the long serving pastor of First Chinese Church, one of the 4 sister churches, including us here at St Elizabeth's, which founded the Chinese Christian Association way back in the 1880s.

The Star Advertiser ran an article about Rev Lee's retirement and the thing that caught my eye was the story of how his parishioners scold him for sweeping up or mopping up around the church.

"That's not a job for ministers!" comes the scolding, words some of us, who shall remain nameless, hear quite regularly when we try to grab a broom or wash some dishes over at Shim Hall!

But the reason we ordained are called to be servants is because we are called to be an example — that in fact - every person, ordained or not, is called to serve others — but not for the reasons that usually come to my mind.

When I think of serving others, I usually think of a kind of forced humility.

Like eating Brussel sprouts, you may not like it, but it's good for you!

But what if the call to service is not about being good, or putting a shine on our spiritual armor?

What if serving others isn't really even about humility?

What if serving others is about how we can get to that standpoint, that viewpoint, that actually allows us to catch a glimpse of God doing her miraculous thing in the world?

What if all of creation is set up in such a way that the only way to get that glimmer of God doing amazing things in this life – is from the underside, from that place called, service?

I suggest these things because perhaps that's what today's gospel is trying to get through my often status obsessed, control freak, "hey, look at me!" state of mind – which is, sad to say – my typical state of mind.

Applying my usual state of mind, today's gospel is little more than a cute magic show, but instead of a banana being turned into a rabbit, we have water being turned into wine.

But if we take a closer look at today's story, something entirely different reveals itself.

The only people, aside from Mary and the disciples, who know what's going on, are the servants.

"Now when the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew)..."

They knew because of where they stood...

And something else about being a servant.

It's hard work!

Keep in mind that these servants didn't have a fire hose or running water to fill the six 20-30 gallon cisterns.

No, they put a bucket down a well, down and up, 30 times per jar, 180 total gallons.

No need for any of them to stop off at 24 Hour Fitness that night, their muscles were well exercised!

Which tells us something we often forget: transformation, like miracles, always requires hard work!

Whether it's the disciples picking up all those left overs after the feeding of the 5000, or Lazarus' pals pushing away the heavy rock from his tomb, when God gets active in the world, it's time to roll up our sleeves!

So if we are all called to be servants, what does being a servant look like?

And maybe the best place to start answering that question is by paying attention to what being a servant **doesn't** look like.

It doesn't look like abuse - physical, sexual or emotional.

It doesn't look like gas lighting - being manipulated by those who try to upend someone's truth or experience.

No, the servanthood of Christ, like the servanthood of all Christians, is all about becoming a servant of the one true God, rather than becoming the servant of the many gods we ourselves create: the gods of fortune, fame, ego, and security.

And the thing is, in becoming a servant of God, you will almost invariably be at odds with the status quo; the status quo being the same thing that St John and St Paul refer to as "the world."

The status quo, or the world as we know it, is ruled by ego and power, by people who remain blind to or sneer at the perspective of the servant.

It's the motivating cause for the current government shut down; it's the fuel that seeks to keep wages low and work hours long.

So what **does it mean** to be a servant of Christ?

Perhaps it means to be part of

"a movement of change within the world, a movement which seeks to transform the way we relate to one another, as individuals, yes, but more importantly, through the structures we create that dehumanize.

This movement is always hated by the world, it's guaranteed to conflict with the power structures of the world, but it is, eventually, also guaranteed to 'overcome the world.'

The preaching of the gospel is a direct threat to the values of the world and to the economic and political structures which embody those values." H. McCabe, Priesthood and Revolution, Commonwealth, 18, paraphrased.

And so, from the servant's point of view, we Christians seek to change the aim of the world.

Rather than aiming at making as much as we can, we Christians are called to aim first at providing all people with a decent life.

Instead of an economic system that depends on exploiting the many for the benefit of the few, we Christians are called to aim to create an economy that **serves** people, not just the few, but everyone.

It means we Christians are called to always take the servants point of view, to aim not merely for revolution, but for a complete transformation of this world.

“Oh really?” you may be saying to yourself!

Christians are mostly focused, like everyone else, on feathering their own nests in this life, while doing just enough to hopefully pass through the pearly gates on the other side of this life.

But that way of being Christian is a far cry from the life Jesus invites us into, a life Jesus calls “the kingdom of God” - a kingdom the world has successfully, and erroneously, redefined as “heaven” - a definition that Jesus utterly and completely rejects.

God is not concerned with disembodied souls nor is God primarily concerned with life after death.

God is concerned with our bodies, with this life - which is precisely why God becomes a human being - to show us how to become fully human - not in the sweet by and by - but NOW!

“Heaven, in the Bible, is not a future destiny; it is the other, hidden dimension of ordinary life - God’s dimension!” Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, 19.

What this means exactly is difficult to define, so Jesus gives us stories, stories that help us make our way to the place of the servant, that place where we are given a glimpse of what this kingdom - hidden within the ordinary - is like.

It's like a treasure buried in a field, and when you find it you sell all you have to buy that field.

It's like a handful of yeast thrown into 50 pounds of flour, creating bread for the whole neighborhood.

It's like wheat growing among weeds, or a pearl growing inside a grave-like shell, it's like a woman finding a lost coin, or a man welcoming home his long lost son.

This kingdom is open to everyone, if only we will move ourselves from the lofty heights of common sense and inflated egos to the radical edge where the servant sits and waits, and is amazed.

Which is why the rich usually don't get it, but children always do, and why stories, not slogans, experience, not creeds, show us the way into this odd new life.

Seeing life through servant eyes is what led the great Karl Barth, who wrote huge volumes about every line of scripture, who is perhaps the greatest theologian of the 20th century, when he is asked to summarize his faith, this genius — with servant eyes — replies:

"This is the sum and substance of my faith:

'Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'"

In refusing to take on servant's eyes, we become trapped, just like King Herod, who has received reports of Jesus raising the dead.

"I do not wish him to do that," cries Herod.

"I forbid him to do that.

I allow no man to raise the dead.

This man must be found and told that I forbid him to raise the dead!

Where is this man?' the king demands.

Replies the servant, "He is in every place my Lord, but it is hard to find him." O. Wilde, Salome.

Unless, of course, you have acquired servant eyes, for then, you will find him everywhere.

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