# Why We Serve.

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St. Paul’s UMC | June 27-28, 2020

Scripture Readings:

Philippians 2: 4-8

John 14: 13-14

Hello. Welcome, once again, to St. Paul’s Church. My name is Matt Skillen; I am one of the pastors here, and I have the humble pleasure of sharing God’s word with you today. We know from the analytical demographics that we receive from Facebook and YouTube that people from different parts of the country are tuning in to this worship service. Wherever you are, whether it be on a computer at your kitchen table or gathered with family around your television, we welcome you in the name of Jesus Christ—the name above all names and the only name worthy of praise.

This week we are concluding a mini sermon series that we call “Why.” Throughout these four weeks we’ve explored why we love, why we believe, why we gather and this week we will explore why we serve.

Throughout this message series we’ve taken our direction and reflection from John’s Gospel. And, as we have read and studied God’s word, we’ve seen, time and again, that Jesus is the remarkable role model that we look to when we examine the foundational tenants of what it means to be a devoted believer and worshiper of the one true God.

I wonder if you’ve ever had the experience of being a role model to someone else. If you’ve had this experience, you might recognize this weird feeling that ultimately develops when you realize that your actions and decisions are being watched. Your every move is being interpreted by others.

I can remember when I was just starting my teaching career. I was about 23 or 24 years old. It was a Saturday and I was running a number of errands around town. I was planning a special dinner at home that night for me and Rebekah and I thought I would pick up the nicest bottle of wine $12 could buy—I’m a teacher after all. So, I pulled into the liquor store—it was situated in a strip mall on a busy street in west Wichita. I parked my car somewhere in the middle of the busy parking lot and made my way up to the row of stores, when I heard a familiar voice say, “Mr. Skillen!”

I turned around to see Mikayla—one of my seventh grade students—and her parents walking toward me. They were loaded down with shopping bags, but we managed to shake hands and make pleasantries on the sidewalk in front of the shopping center. On the outside, I was Mr. Skillen—the energetic, fun-loving English teacher. On the inside, I was terrified. I felt like I had been caught in the act. I was about to walk into a… Liquor Store… What kind of example is that to set for a seventh grade student?

I was so compelled to be a good role model for my student that when we finally parted ways, I walked right by the liquor store and stepped into the business next door. I had no idea what kind of business it was, but I didn’t want to even give the impression of a poor decision in front of my student and her family. So, you can imagine my surprise when I walked in to the adjacent store it was a nail salon. Who knows what Mikayla’s family was thinking after that…

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As we pick up Jesus’s story in John 14, Jesus is serving as the ultimate role model and he has a message for his disciples, **“Know your role.”** Throughout chapters 13-17 of John’s Gospel, Jesus is pouring into his disciples. He is the ultimate role model in showing the guys who have been his closest friends how (and why) they will serve others.

Earlier in this series we see how confusing these messages and lessons that Jesus is teaching his disciples are. Jesus washes his disciples’ feet when they feel as though they should be washing his feet. Jesus then serves bread first to the person who leaves to betray him. And then, he gives the ultimate commandment—to love everyone as he has loved them. In doing so, Jesus was orienting the disciples in a way that would prepare them for the remarkable change the world will undergo following his death and resurrection. He was, in a sense, preparing them to know their role so that they would be model to Christ followers for generations to come.

After a series of difficult discussions in chapter 13, chapter 14 begins with some reassuring words. Jesus says, **“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God and Believe in me.”** And what a remarkable thing to be reminded of in a time such as this, amen? Just like the disciples, we’ve been thrown into an entirely different world than one we knew before. Nearly everything we do has been impacted by a set of new social mores that value distance and masking—two things that seem wholly unnatural to those of us who live in community with one another. What is Jesus saying in these times: don’t let your heart be troubled. Know your role. “Believe in God and believe in me.”

Sharing a belief in God comes with an active requirement. In such a time as a global pandemic, a truly troubling time, we’ve seen an outpouring of the church—those who believe—out into the world several times over. Just as Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, the church has stepped up in mighty ways to serve the people most vulnerable and dangerously impacted by COVID-19 and the economic collapse that immediately followed the local, regional, national and international shutdowns.

It was the church that became the site for food distribution for school children. For so many in our community, the two meals that children receive each day during the regular school year may be the only 10 meals they can count on for the week. While the schools closed, the churches moved to action to help distribute the food that was so desperately needed.

While the church could not open its doors for services, it served as a beacon of hope for those struggling with addiction as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings were held regularly in church basements, gathering spaces and multipurpose rooms all across the country.

When shelters and food banks were overrun and overloaded it was the church that opened its doors to help those in need. When hospitals and first responders needed supplies, the Church stepped in to donate everything it had—gloves and sanitizer. And faith-based sewing circles fired up their sewing machines to ensure that anyone who needed a protective face covering had one.

This is who we are. This is how we serve. This is the role we play and in knowing our role we also know why we do it. Not for the glory of ourselves, to somehow marvel in all that we have done, but for the glory of Christ.

This is no small thing. **Every act of selfless Christian service to another plays an important part in the movement for Christ on Earth.** We are, in this way, serving as Christ’s ambassadors, appealing to the nature in all of us that seeks to be connected to God, the Creator of all things, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, our one true and lasting redeemer. This is the God we serve and the God who is amplified through our service.

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Knowing our role is critical in the service we share with one another. In our human economy we might think or expect that we are owed something in return for helping our neighbor or volunteering in our community. But friends, let me tell you that while we would like to think that somehow this economy has a scale that can somehow be balanced, what you will find is that no matter how much we try, we can never balance the scale.

In the grander scheme of things there was a pretty significant imbalance that Jesus addressed while on earth. Though the price on souls was heavy because the wage of sin in our lives was death, Jesus laid down his life on our side of the scale and wiped away the debt. In this way, we became reconciled with God, living no longer under the fear of death for the sins we have committed. That is the God we serve and who we are to him.

In his conversation with the disciples, Jesus explains that those who know him also know where he is going. He has made a place for them and those who know Jesus already know the way there. He says in verse 6 and 7 **“I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”**

You see in this passage, two disciples Phillip and Thomas are asking some interesting questions. Remember, earlier I said that Jesus was sharing things that would have sounded very confusing to his disciples, but his teachings in this case are meant to help shape his disciples for the world that would be waiting for them. They were asking Jesus to show them the way; to show them God’s face, and Jesus is saying “I am the way. I am the Father and the Father is me.” I imagined that up to this point the disciples may have thought they were on some kind of Journey with Jesus and at some point God would be revealed to them. At the peak of their curiosity and confusion Jesus says, “Hey, guys it’s me. The thing you’ve been looking for is right here in front you. Calm your hearts and know that I am God, and I will always be with you.”

Jesus Christ, He is **the way** we know to Heaven and our Heavenly Father. He is the **The Truth**, the truth that above all else Jesus loved us so much that he died for our sins. The things that we do that separate us from God. And He is **the life**, the life everlasting that now fills us with hope—that no matter what may come—God is not just with us now; He is always with us.

That is the message we carry when we serve. In times of natural disaster, personal chaos and life-changing occurrences, we respond. We respond to be the very voice, the very hands, the heart and presence of God for those in times of dramatic need.

Nearly two years ago I was in California attending a conference at the Stanford University Design School. I was about 12 hours away from boarding a plane to return home when I got that call that no parent or spouse wants to receive while away from home. One of my children had been taken to the hospital, and I knew there was absolutely nothing I could do about it. But let me tell you what the church did. Can I tell you, for a moment, how the church moved to bless me and my family?

Within moments of hearing that the ambulance was rolling to Hershey two people from St. Paul’s staff dropped everything they were doing to meet my wife and son at the hospital. And while they likely had family obligations of their own, they stayed with them—doing anything they could at a moment’s notice—until they were discharged later that night and gave them a ride home, because, as it turns out, rides home from the hospital in the ambulance are not included in your one-time admission.

Thankfully, no miraculously, my son escaped this episode with only a few bruises and scrapes. While we will never forget that day, we will also never forget the selfless service our church provided in our desperate time of need. That is who we are, and that is the great potential we have.

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Know your role. In this great landscape we have so many opportunities to be the light that someone needs, to be a listening ear, a helping hand, a prayerful neighbor, or an anchor in a storm. Don’t overlook these opportunities. Know your role.

In knowing who we are and why we are here, we have the very important opportunity to turn what we do into an act of lasting service for the Kingdom of God. This is who we are, and that is why we serve. We serve because in **every act of service to the Kingdom we are, in effect, pointing everyone we serve to the way, the truth and the life—Jesus Christ**.

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