

Servant of All

[James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a, Mark 9:30-37](#)

I wanted to begin by sharing a story with you from Pastor Tom Shepard. Dave Thomas, the founder of Wendy's, became a familiar sight to millions with his company's television commercials. Dave also appeared in a lot of training films for Wendy's employees. In those training films he would dress as his workers dressed – wearing a Wendy's hat and apron. One year he appeared on the cover of one of the company's annual reports dressed in a knee-length work apron holding a mop and a plastic bucket. Dave never finished high school but later in life he got his GED. Dave was a self-made millionaire. Long before he went off on his own and started Wendy's, he worked his way up through the ranks of the Colonel Sanders' Kentucky Fried Chicken chain. He was not unaccustomed to hard work.

Dave said, “I got my MBA long before I got my GED. At Wendy’s, MBA does not mean Master of Business Administration – it means Mop Bucket Attitude.” Dave Thomas taught all his employees that service comes before success.

It seems the disciples needed a similar tutorial from Jesus. Perhaps we too could learn from this lesson of the need for service. Leaders in any arena are rarely pictured as providing service to their subordinates. The normal and usual job of a leader is to make decisions, develop long-term plans and plot strategies to move things forward in a coordinated direction. Leaders in general cannot be concerned with menial tasks – they simply assign those tasks to someone else.

Jesus’ disciples seemed to have gotten hung up on this idea of importance. In the gospel lesson we find Jesus and his disciples traveling, and just out of earshot, the disciples are

hosting an argument about which one of them is the greatest disciple. How petty! Did they learn nothing of the importance of community? Did they learn nothing of what it means to be a follower of Christ? It seems they simply could not grasp the heavenly principles that Jesus continued to teach them. Instead, they could only focus on what was in front of them – something tangible.

It sounds like a very real lesson for us today. It's easy to get caught up in wanting to lead – wanting to seem important. There are probably fewer children that say when they grow up and take on those noble yet unseen jobs – those that work behind the scenes to make everything go smoothly. Far more would prefer to be the star on stage than the stage hand behind the curtain.

Maybe we should take a moment and think like a disciple in Jesus' time. They had finally come to the realization that Jesus was the Messiah – the anointed one. Surely that would mean he would be recognized as the great one he was. Surely there would be true freedom for the Jews in a tremendous and awesome victory over the Romans who occupied their land. God had answered their prayers and here in their midst was the Son of Man who had chosen them as his inner circle. That could be quite a boost to the ego for a group of lowly fishermen.

The disciples were hung up on the earthly idea of Jesus as king who would solve their problems and provide them with a life of ease. But Jesus as Messiah had a very different perspective. Jesus was looking toward heavenly things. Jesus was concerned for the souls of all humankind. Jesus came to be sacrificed – he was going to die and rise from the dead as true

victor. Jesus was going to ensure salvation for all by paving the way with his own blood.

So we find the disciples arguing over who is the greatest among them. They wanted to establish the pecking order. Who would be seen as the true leader of the pack? Who was number one among the twelve? But when Jesus confronts them, they keep silent. Obviously, they had second thoughts about their actions. Maybe Jesus saw a glimmer of hope in their guilty silence. But Jesus knew them – he knew their thoughts and the seeds of desire planted in their hearts. Even when they did not voice what was discussed, Jesus answered them saying, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.” Jesus was telling them they needed a Mop Bucket Attitude.

I learned a lot about leadership skills and team building in my other life. Many experts will tell you that you cannot lead

by threatening or pressuring or demanding. The true sign of a good leader was for that leader to turn around and see if anyone was following. Leading by example and by taking a humble approach certainly isn't popular, but it most certainly is Godly. Jesus provided us with the perfect example of a servant leader. Jesus was extremely patient and loving with his inner circle of disciples. Time and again we would find the disciples lost or confused – they simply weren't getting it most of the time. This did not stop our model servant leader. Jesus provided the guidance and the encouragement and the example of what it meant to be the servant of all. Service comes before success. You have to be willing to do the work before you reap the benefits. The old saying holds true, "You reap what you sow."

Where do we see ourselves in the spectrum of servant leadership? Are we willing to take on the tasks that need done,

even if there is no recognition or reward beyond a note of thanks? Are we willing to step forward and accept Jesus' challenge to help our neighbors in need without thought for ourselves? I think we are. I think we understand that God has called us to serve in this community. We may not know exactly what that means yet, but I know without a doubt that the faithful servants are here and willing to extend the hand of grace in every way possible. I believe many of us came here with our Mop Bucket Attitude firmly in place!

I wanted to share a story with you that many of you may have already heard. The first time my husband Mark and I met most of you was at the Mother's Day chicken dinner held 2 months before I started as pastor here. My right arm was in a sling because I had just had rotator cuff surgery. We walked in and were warmly greeted. We went through the routine of

placing our order and were ushered into the hall. Our meals were served to us – which were outstanding as always. I'll brag a bit on my husband because as soon as he had finished dinner, he went in to kitchen and asked how he could help. By the time I came back, he had his hands elbow deep in soapy water.

Jimmy Gardner told me later that he was telling folks, "I don't care if you like her, we're keeping him!" Mop Bucket Attitude!

Everything we do is an expression of servant leadership. Whether it is serving a dinner, cleaning bathrooms, setting up for an outside service or dressing up for Halloween to allow our children see our silly side, we can embody the teachings of Jesus. "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me," (Mark 9:37). Understand that in Jesus' day, children were virtually non-existent. They were considered the least of any human life. They were most assuredly

considered to have no significance or importance. Jesus was taking tradition and once again turning it on its ear. Leaders are to be servants, and children are to be welcomed and embraced. Our faith gives us the strength to move mountains and change lives through our caring and concern for others. Share the good news! Christ came to earth as a humble servant of all so that through him we can be saved. Let us leave this place with our Mop Bucket Attitude firmly in place. And while we're at it, share the love of God with everyone you meet. Let us continue to be the servants of all. Amen.