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“His Service, Not Self-Service”

Text: Acts 20:28-35; Titus 1:1-9; Luke 10:1-9

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

More and more, things in our world are self-service.

As far as I can remember, it seems to have started with gas pumps. There used to be attendants who would pump your gas for you, but now - unless you live in New Jersey or Oregon - you have to do it yourself. It's almost all self-service now.

One of the next change was banking. You don't have to go into the bank and talk to a teller anymore when you need to make a deposit or withdraw cash - just go up to the ATM and do it yourself. Or for some, you can even make a deposit through your cell phone.

And now you even have self-service checkout at the supermarket and many other stores. It started with a cashier scanning your items and you having to bag them yourself, but now you even scan them yourself. And it's not unusual anymore to see more self-service checkout lanes open than there are cashiers waiting to help you.

Self-service. Just do it yourself. It's faster, easier, and for many people preferable.

And so it makes sense that more and more people are beginning to see religion or things spiritual in the same way now - as self-service. No need for church, no need for other people. Just do it yourself. Help yourself.

Now all this self-service may be good when it comes to certain areas of our life, but it is not when it comes to things spiritual, when it comes to the church. It never was, and never will be. In fact, when our first parents tried self-service and helped themselves, it didn't turn out so well.

And it is the same today. Or even worse. For if our first parents couldn't do it *before* they fell into sin, *after* is no better. This self-service mindset actually feeds the sin that now lives in us that wants to be independent and self-sufficient, to stand on our own, to be strong and not need anyone else. I can find God on my own. I can get what I need. I know what I need.

But the truth is, faith really is the opposite of all that. For as we grow in faith we grow not independent of God and need Him less and less, as some would have you believe today.

To grow in faith means that we grow in our dependence on God and know our need more and more. For independence from God is called death. He is the source of our life.

And so from the beginning, God has arranged for the care of His church. To give His people what is needed. To care for them with His Word and His gifts. To care for His church, as Paul says, ***that He obtained with His own blood***. And today that means pastors, as we remember and commemorate one of the earliest pastors in the church, named Titus.

The things about pastors, though - whenever we talk about them, it's not really about them. It's all about the church they care for. In fact, if it ever becomes about them, about the man, then the focus is wrong. Pastors are given by Christ. Pastors give Christ and His Word. And Pastors give to those who belong to Christ. It's all about Him. It's all about Christ.

All the readings today were about pastors and those sent by Christ to proclaim His Word, but except for Titus, we don't know their names. Jesus sent the 72 out ahead of Him, but who they were wasn't important. What was important was that *they were going before Jesus*. What was important was their proclamation: ***The kingdom of God has come near to you***.

In the first reading from Acts, Paul is speaking to the Ephesian pastors - who they were wasn't important, but what they would do was. They were to ***pay careful attention to the flock and care for the church of God*** of which ***the Holy Spirit had made them overseers***. And notice: no self-service there! For the church or the pastors.

And then in the reading from Paul's letter to Titus, Paul tells Titus to ***appoint elders*** - which is a biblical word for pastors - ***in every town*** on the island of Crete, to give the people ***instruction in sound doctrine and also rebuke those who contradict it***.

And all this because the satanic wolf and his pack are still out there. Paul knew it, telling the Ephesian pastors: ***I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them***.

Jesus knew it too, telling the 72: ***I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves***.

So how does the wolf attack? What does he do? Well first of all, the wolf attacks with lies and false doctrine, to drag us away from Jesus. Trying to get you to believe that God's Word isn't really God's Word, or it's unreliable, or it's just too old. All those things it calls sin we know really aren't sin anymore. So don't worry about it. You're actually a pretty good person, you know. Especially compared to the rest!

Or if he can't get you with that, he'll try to opposite - to get you to believe that you're too big a sinner, too far gone, that God could not ever possibly love someone like you. Just look at yourself! All those horrible thoughts you have, those lustful and evil desires you have, those hurtful words you say, and those things you do or are too lazy to do.

Or if he can't get you with that, he'll try a whole host of other ways to get you to rely on self-service. It's too inconvenient to go to church. Those people at church are too bothersome and messy, or don't want to be bothered with your mess. Or, there's too many churches - you can't really believe any of them. Or, it really doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you believe something. That's an especially popular one these days. But the bottom line to all of them, to all these temptations and lies, is self-service. To separate you from God. That you help yourself. Do it yourself. Decide for yourself. And die.

But the truth is that into this world came a servant. A servant who did nothing to serve Himself; everything He did was to serve you. He was born for you, lived for you, suffered for you, and died for you. He taught the truth - calling sin sin, but even more showing the love of God in all He said and did. He didn't pretend that lepers weren't really unclean - He cleansed them. He didn't pretend the deaf and blind and mute were okay - He healed them. He didn't let sinners go on in their sin as if it didn't matter - He called them to repentance and forgave them. For in Him, in Jesus, *the kingdom of God had come near*. In Jesus, God had come to serve His people. All the way to the cross.

For the cross is the ultimate opposite of self-service. There is Jesus all for you. Dying for your sin, the death you deserve, that in His resurrection you may rise with Him to life. Shedding His blood for you, that you be cleansed of your sin and live as children of God. So that you live in a truthful confidence - not a false confidence born of self-service - but the truthful confidence of a God and Saviour who loves you so much that He would lay down His life for you.

And pastors He gives to point to this truth, the truth of the cross. To care for the flock by pointing to the cross. Preaching it, teaching it, and living it. To baptize and apply Jesus' death and resurrection and love. To absolve and apply His forgiveness. To give out His Body and Blood that died on the cross and rose from the dead to feed and strengthen His children with His life and to the same resurrection. And pastors do so not because they choose to do so, or because they are better or stronger than everyone else - *pastors need pastors too!* But because, as Paul said, *the Holy Spirit has made them overseers*.

Pastors are given by God to the congregations they serve. And God desires that they do only this - *only* this, but *always* this: point to the cross of Jesus and all that means. That they preach the strong Word of God to show you your sin, but even more to show you your Saviour. That you not listen to the self-serving wolf who wants you to be self-

-serving like him, but listen to your Saviour and receive His service to you. His service which gives life. His service which gives a kingdom that will never end.

For it's not easy being a Christian. You know that. God knows it too. That's why Jesus came to serve and is coming and serving you still. And that's why He continues to send pastors like Titus - to fill you with Himself, His Spirit, and His truth. To be with the flock, care for the flock, and love the flock. That His Word and truth be preached and given. That His Word and truth live in you. That His Word and truth thwart the efforts of the evil one who wants to mislead and deceive.

For still today, ***the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*** Pray earnestly for your pastor and all pastors. Pray earnestly for George and all studying to be pastors. Pray earnestly for the Holy Spirit to call more men into the holy ministry.

And fulfill your callings too. Taking the Word that is here preached and given to you out into your lives and homes, your workplaces and schools, and show the life and love of Christ to the world. That wherever the evil one be lurking or attacking, there also be the love and truth and forgiveness of Christ - the love and truth and forgiveness the wolf hates and cannot stand against. That as you are blessed by Christ's giving, those around you may be blessed by your giving. And the life and love of Christ, then, fill the world.

So just say no to this mindset of self-service! To the life of independence and self-sufficiency. There's a better way. The Christ way. His service to you. Depend on Him. Receive Him. Grow in Him. And then go and fill the world with Christ, His service, and His love.

Almighty God, You called Titus to the work of pastor and teacher. Make all shepherds of Your flock diligent in preaching Your holy Word so that the whole world may know the immeasurable riches of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.