

God's blessings you in every way, grace and peace be multiplied. Amen.

Mark 10:35–45 (NKJV)

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask." **36** And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" **37** They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory." **38** But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" **39** They said to Him, "We are able." So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; **40** but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared." **41** And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. **42** But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. **43** Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. **44** And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. **45** For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

MINISTRY MEANS SERVICE

In Jesus Name, the Servant of servants, the First and the Last, dear fellow redeemed,

Good customer service can be hard to find. Maybe you are the type who really pays attention to the service you are receiving. Do you tip the waiter more generously if he or she has more generously served you? Over the phone can be among the most frustrating. You the customer call: ... please wait while your request is being processed. You press the numbers, just trying to get to that one right person. Ten minutes later either they take you back to the main menu or they respond "sorry, there are no service representatives available, please try back later."

The word "ministry" means service. To minister to someone means to serve. To be a minister is to be a servant. We find Jesus using this word in v.43 – "... **whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant (your minister).**" (Mark 10:43)

Great customer service always puts the customer first. May the Spirit bless us as we consider what ministry means to us. Ministry means service – For Jesus, for your pastor, and for you.

1. Jesus' Ministry – serve you

Jesus' ministry is all about good customer service. In fact it is about the greatest of all customer service. Here is that same word for "servant" used as a verb in v.45 – "**For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve (to minister), and to give His life a ransom for many.**" (Mark 10:45).

Unlike the customer service rep you speak to on the phone, Jesus wasn't getting paid one dime to serve you. Quite the opposite. We owe Him to begin with. We owe a debt to God that we can never meet. If it wasn't for Jesus, how could we ask anything of God? How could we offer Him anything? What do we possess that He does not already have? The Son of Man did not come to be served by us – that is for sure.

And what is our attitude? “We want you to do something for us.” This is how James and John respond. And how much more true is this for us today? We live in a society where we are programmed to think this way. What can you give me? What do I get out of this deal? TV and mass marketing are focused on catering to this desire – the desire to be first.

James and John were looking for a reserved seat in the kingdom. “Grant that we may sit on your right and left.” In the king's realm these are the highest positions of honor. It is possible that James and John were also still thinking earthly. They were still not realizing the glory of Jesus' victory was going to be preceded by the worst of humiliations. The Son of Man did come to be served, but to serve. He came to wash His disciples feet. He came to heal, to pray, and to preach. Above all, Jesus came to minister to our greatest need – the burden of sin.

Here is the great difference between the way this world works and the way God's world works. (v.42) We do, after all, call Jesus our Lord. Jesus is our Master – the Ruler and King of all mankind. Yet His rule did not come by means of exultation. He did not take control of Your heart and life by being a ruthless dictator. Rather Your Lord gave Himself as a ransom.

What king of this world would ever do such a thing? The word “ransom” emphasizes the price required to free a slave. This is the liberation price. It pictures you in shackles, shuffling behind the sinful desires that lead you. Satan is at the helm, commanding his subjects. In steps Jesus. “Wait! I will take their place.” The word “for many” does not give the full sense of the original. The emphasis is that of substitution. He gave His life the redemption price INSTEAD OF the many. Jesus gave His life a ransom in the place of the many sinners of this world. “The many” emphasizes the great multitude of slaves that are being led captive toward death. Jesus stepped into your place. With Good Friday just 12 days away for us we see Jesus, journeying toward Jerusalem in your place, instead of the many. His perfect life and innocent blood are the ransom price. **MINISTRY MEANS SERVICE.**

2. Your Pastor's Ministry – serve you

There is a reason why we sometimes refer to pastors as ministers. This describes their job and their work. Your pastor is not your lord, he is your minister, your servant. Scripture uses different words to describe the work and calling of your pastor – words like shepherd, overseer of souls, and minister or servant. Your pastor's ministry is one of service to you.

(v.40) – So being a pastor should never be about being the greatest, most influential, most appealing of all preachers. It should be about being a minister. But a minister of what?

The early church faced that question. In Acts chapter 6, the disciples found that the widows of the congregation were being neglected in the distribution of food. The apostles respond, **“It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve (minister to) tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry (the service) of the word.”** (Acts 6:2-4).

You have called me here to serve you with the word. It is the tradition here to have an Easter brunch following the worship service this Resurrection Sunday. And even though I make a decent omelet, this is not our primary service. The service God brings to you this Easter service is an even more important feast – the Feast of our Lord’s Victory over death. I am here to serve up the our Lord’s resurrection which declares us forgiven.

You may notice at the beginning of our worship today, the order we are following is entitled “Divine Service.” This is something we will soon begin discussing following Easter in Bible Study. We will discuss worship and the significance of what we do here on Sundays. By calling this worship ceremony, “divine service” we are emphasizing that it is God’s service not ours. Our worship is not about us giving something to God, it is about God giving something to us. This Divine Service is where God brings to us the forgiveness of sins. This is where He communes with us in bread and wine. This is where He visits us in His word, bringing comfort and causing growth. This is where earth meets heaven – a Divine Service to our greatest needs.

Hence in the p.15 liturgy of the Lutheran Hymnal, the pastor says, “I as a called servant of the Word...” This is what your pastor is here to do – serve you with the Word. He is here to bring you the good news that your sins are forgiven. Whether it is in these public services or in private visits – that is what He should be doing. This is why Jesus gave some to be apostles, some prophets, and some pastors and teachers. In Ephesians, Paul calls it **“equipping the saints for the work of ministry – the work of service, for the building up of the body of Christ.”** Notice how Paul shifts the focus in that passage. ...to equip the saints for the work of serving. I am not the only minister here. Ministry means service, and you are called to be ministers too. **MINISTRY MEANS SERVICE.**

3. Your Ministry – serve God and all people

The Church is not a self-help group; it is a God-help group. God did not ransom us back from sin to serve ourselves. Your ministry is one of service to God. And when you serve God, you cannot avoid serving others too.

(v.42,44) So often like John and James, we think, “we want you to do something for us.” Whether it is toward God or toward our fellow man, our flesh is used to being served. In marriage for instance, what is the first reaction when the spouse asks you to do something for them. What has he or she done for me first? We are so inclined to expect something from someone else first before we will offer any help in return.

And children, if I were to offer you a free trip to Disney world, but told you there was only one ticket – would you want it? Or would your first thought be about some other kid in the congregation, or your brother or sister. “I want to be first...” first in line, first to be served, first in, first out. But it is not about all that. Our service is to be unconditional.

(v.45) – Thank God that in Jesus we find that unconditional love and service. For all our conditional cooperation and sinful self-service, Jesus has given Himself. He is the full payment for your sins, so that despite our selfish nature, God forgives us and counts us righteous before Him.

While we still live in this world, our ministry is not so glorious by outward looks. Your service to God is not about reserving the best seat in heaven. You are called to be last. (v.39) It is as if now we walk through the same suffering that Jesus has faced. This is our witness before the world, that we now give our life for others – for our spouse, for our brother or sister, for our neighbor, even for our enemy.

I have had to think about this when we use different websites to advertise our church. What services do we provide? Every good advertiser will emphasize in his ad those services he is able to provide. That is what the customer needs to know. Ultimately what services are you here to provide? The ministry of the Church is the same as Jesus’ – we are here to meet man’s greatest needs. **“God, ... through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”** (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

We provide the ministry of reconciliation. For God has in Christ made the world right with Him through the ransom of His Son. We don’t want to be guilty of false advertising. We are not here to serve others with a bright and promising earthly future. We are here to promise a bright and glorious heavenly future. We are not here to help others cope and just get by, we are here to help others overcome and truly survive. God is here to give to man what He needs most – His Word of comfort, the power of His forgiveness, and the eternal hope that exists in our Savior Jesus. But He does not magically implant this into random hearts, He employs you as His servant to bring this to the specific people He puts in your life.

Still, while we still live in this world, our ministry is not so glorious by outward looks. In all things, in every relation or situation, this is your ministry. Sometimes this comes to us

in the most difficult of times. Sometimes this is in the midst of persecution or suffering. Sometimes this is at times when you feel most down, most lost, or most conflicted. As Paul also writes in 2 Corinthians, **“but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities,”** (2 Corinthians 6:4)

As Jesus relates the parable of the faithful servant, He calls us to a constant readiness. He calls us to be faithful as we endure the onslaught of this sinful world. When we wish to retaliate, to cry out in anger, let us look again to our Lord Jesus who faithfully sacrificed His own life to ransom us from death. Jesus says, **“Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.”** (Luke 12:37)

That is what awaits us. When Our Lord returns, He will continue to serve. He has served you in giving up His life to pay for your sins; He is serving you through the Word and Sacrament in which He is present; and He will serve you when He welcomes you into His kingdom of glory. In that final deliverance you will receive the full honors that our Lord Jesus has won for you. But its not about being first into that kingdom. It is about being last. Our ministry is to get all other people into that kingdom ahead of us.

Great customer service always puts the customer first. Jesus’ ministry put us first. Your pastor’s ministry is to put you first. And Your ministry is to put God first as you serve your fellow man. MINISTRY MEANS SERVICE. In Christ Jesus, your glorified Servant, Amen.