

**St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector

Scripture: John 13:1-17

***"Our Servant Model – Jesus Christ"***

We all have many images of Jesus – when we picture Him, when we think about Him, and even when we pray to Him. Many of us picture Him sitting at the table with His Apostles in the image of the “Last Supper”, or possibly His preaching on the mount, maybe performing one of His many miracles, gathering the children to His side, standing at the door with no door handle – awaiting someone to open to Him, or in agony as He died on the cross. Our image of Christ may differ according to our needs, physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Not too long ago, our bishop - Bishop Bill Atwood, spoke to the men’s Discipleship breakfast and gave us an image of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. I want to suggest to you this morning that there is one image of Christ that we all need to pay attention to and to learn from, and that is Jesus as our servant model. Jesus laid aside His majesty in order to serve humanity. His life and death is the supreme example of His servant-hood, thereby fulfilling of the will of God His Father.

The word “Servant” in our English New Testament is usually represented by the Greek words *doulos* (δουλος) (bond servant or slave) and *diakonos* (διακονος) (servant, deacon or minister); both words depict a man who is not his own, but is truly his master's purchased property. Bought to serve his master's needs, to be at his beck and call every moment, the slave's sole business is to do as he is told. For a Christian – being a servant means living in a serving relationship to our Savior. The Apostle Paul’s view is crystal clear: *"do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."* (1Corinthians 6:19-20)

Right after the mother of James and John asked Jesus if they could sit at His right hand in His kingdom, Jesus told His disciples: *"whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."* (Matthew 20:26-28) Jesus came to take on flesh so that we could follow His example in service to one another and To Him.

Jesus explained this to us in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 12 when He told how God had spoken through Isaiah concerning the Messiah. Jesus said: *"This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:"* **BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN; MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL is WELL-PLEASSED; I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM, AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES."** **HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT; NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS."** **A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT, UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY."** **AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE."** (Matthew 12:17-21)

Jesus, the anointed one of God – the Messiah, came as a servant – not merely to serve but also to suffer. Our Lord would fulfill Isaiah’s prophesy of the “suffering servant”- as meek and as humble as a lamb – the Lamb of God. *"Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of*

*us all to fall on Him." "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth." (Isaiah 53:4-7)*

Serving is a humbling experience, as Jesus reminded His apostles, more than once, asking them *"For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves."* (Luke 22:27) Time after time, Jesus through His words and example showed the world that He came to do His Father's will and that if we love Him we will do likewise. (John 4:34, 6:38, 14:31) But let's admit it – serving is not always the most popular thing on our mind – right? On the night before Jesus died – He gave to the world something extraordinary, something very special. In order for Jesus to let the disciples see what He was about to do for them, and for us – He had to wash their feet – He had to let the disciples see Him as the one who serves – who sacrifices, and who loves them beyond reason.

Have you ever had to wash someone else's feet? The first time I had to wash someone else's feet (other than those of my children) was when I worked as a team member in preparation for a retreat weekend called Cursillo. I have never forgotten that experience. I had to wash the feet of the person immediately to my right after having my feet washed by the person to the left of me. It was an act of submission and an act of service and a time of holy intimacy. Believe me it was hard to do – having someone washing my feet - and then me washing another's. Serving another – with no thought of reward!

On that night when Jesus washed the feet of His apostles – when He was done -- He didn't sit back, kick up His feet and say "Ok – now it's my turn!" Instead He fixed His clothing and told them *"I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you."* (John 13:15) As the church, the Body of Christ, we are called to continue to learn this lesson of "sacrificial giving" – of putting others ahead of ourselves – and it is not an easy task. To wash each others' feet might perhaps be the hardest thing that anyone could ask you to do. We are not going to ask you to do that today!

But **there are other ways to serve**. Here at St. Bartholomew's we have many opportunities to serve – and God's timing is perfect – that today is our Ministry Fair, at which you can see the many ways that you can serve God and one another. I ask you to please take the time to explore the tables and ministries following this service - and ask questions of those manning the tables – your fellow servants.

**To lead is to serve:**

On that holy night in the "upper room" Jesus gave us the precious gift of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist – He also gave us His precious vision of a servant. I want suggest to you that this vision – has a dual meaning – a second side. This vision is not just **"to lead is to serve,"** but also, by serving – we step up - and we can set an example – just as Jesus did for us, for others to follow.

**To serve is to lead:**

I believe the mark of a true leader is one whose example we follow. Jesus is showing each one of us not only that To Lead is to serve, but to serve is to lead! As God Himself, Jesus had a

First Sunday of Lent, February 21, 2010, Year C

complete understanding of who He was and what He was to do – and the example that He would set.

- He knew God's plan for Him – He was assured in His relationship with the Father.
- Jesus knows God's plan for us as well – and in equipping us, and preparing us to follow His example - Jesus left us with the gift of the ultimate celebration of fellowship, the Holy Eucharist – so that we might share in Him, and with one another.

Through His own suffering and His sacrifice on the cross; Jesus has given us the means for forgiveness of our sins and assurance of our place in His kingdom. This morning Fr. Ward and I were privileged to give you the "Exhortation", reminding each one of us about a holy Lent and preparation for properly receiving Holy Eucharist. We are reminded of our forgiveness through repentance, with confidence of our Lord's loving sacrifice in our place. With this confidence we can become true servants following the example of Jesus. Our source of strength and courage to do these things; doing things for others, comes from Our Lord Himself – our Servant Model.

Jesus told the disciples, after washing their feet: *"You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."*  
(John 13:13-17)

Jesus set the example for us – and He set the bar high for us. Jesus challenges us – each one of us - to pick up the towel – and serve one another.

Let me close with these powerful words, from the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians: *"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men."* (Philippians 2:5-7)

And so... we serve.