

Sharing the Light: The Light of Service

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1 Samuel 16:14-23

Now the spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him. And Saul's servants said to him, "See now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord now command the servants who attend you to look for someone who is skillful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will feel better." So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me someone who can play well, and bring him to me." One of the young men answered, "I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the LORD is with him." So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, "Send me your son David who is with the sheep." Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a kid, and sent them by his son David to Saul. And David came to Saul, and entered his service. Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight." And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him.

1 Samuel 16:14-23 (NRSV)

This week I was with my grandsons at my daughter's home, and after we had dinner, we went outside, and it was dark. They were showing us around, and my grandsons had these little flashlights. I'd forgotten how much fun it is to be a kid with a flashlight after dark. They shone them all around, of course, in our eyes since that was their number one joy. But shining them around and just leading the way as we walked in the dark. I'd forgotten how awesome it is as a kid to have a flashlight.

My wife has in our toy closet a little bucket full of little cheap flashlights that they can play with. They close the doors, so it's dark and then play with the flashlights like in a fort.

We're going to be talking this fall about shining the light. The world can seem to be a pretty dark place. There are all sorts of challenges all around us. We're dealing with disease right now, and there's also unemployment and conflict in the community. There are racial tensions and disagreements. None of that is really new because there are always challenges. There's loneliness, epidemics of lowliness. There's a rise in family violence. We could just go on and on, making a list of all of the darkness that we need to be pushing back.

The Gospel of John says, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:5). That's going to be our theme this fall as we look over the next weeks at ways that we can be in the business of shining the light of Christ into the world around us. Ways that we can offer ourselves as light, to shine the light of Christ into the lives of other people.

Today we're going to begin by talking about service. Throughout this time, we're going to be using the life of David as kind of a structure for us to look at. We're going to look at David's life and his interactions with various people in his life where that made an impact on him, and he made an impact on them. Today we're going to be talking about David and Saul and the light of service, how we can be shining the light of service into the lives of other people.

Let's pray together. *Gracious God open us up. Open our eyes that we might see, and our ears that we might hear, open our hearts that we might feel. And then, O Lord, open our hands that we might serve. Amen.*

The passage includes this theme sentence: "And David came to Saul and entered his service." This is the beginning of how David moves from being a shepherd boy to going into the service of King Saul, both as a musician and ends up writing many of the Psalms when he comes king. And also, then as his armor-bearer. What I'd like to do is, as we look through this whole passage is to lift up five things that it seems to me that this passage teaches us about how we can offer the light of service to others.

Here's the first one. Verse seventeen says: "Saul said to his servants, 'Provide for me someone who can play well...'" (1 Samuel 16:17). The first thing is that we serve within our spiritual gifts. It says it over and over in the passage. It says they were looking for someone who was "skillful in playing the lyre," and then Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me someone who can play well." Then one of his servants said, "I've seen the son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite who is skillful at playing."

We serve within our spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12, it says, "To each is given a manifestation of the spirit for the common good." We've all been given spiritual gifts. Things that we are to use in the service of the church, in the service of the world. And in the service of one another.

Now sometimes we find ourselves trying to do things that aren't in our spiritual giftedness. I heard of a pastor who said he was going to help at Vacation Bible School with arts and crafts. He gathered all the stuff together that he was supposed to get, he read the instructions for what the project was. They were to make little stained-glass windows out of tissue paper. He brought all the stuff. They were supposed to glue the tissue paper to the construction paper, and it just didn't work. The glue would glob all up, and it was terrible. Finally, one of the fifth-grade girls said, "Can I see the instructions?" She got the instructions, and she said, "This isn't right. This says to use tissue paper, and you're using tissues!" He was using Kleenex instead of tissue paper, so of course, it wasn't going to work. This was clearly not in his area of giftedness.

You see, God made each of us with some things, some spiritual gifts planted within us that the Holy Spirit opens up as we choose to serve.

The week before last I was leading in a memorial service, and it was a graveside service only. The family had gathered around, and often at such a service, I'll invite people just to speak, asking if there's anything someone wants to say at that time. When we have the service here in the church, we select the speakers ahead of time, but at the gravesite, it's more intimate and a less formal setting, so I'll say, "This is an opportunity for you to say something."

Someone got up and spoke, then a young woman stood up, and she just began to sing. She sang this beautiful hymn, and I was first taken aback because it wasn't anything we'd planned or put into the service. But it was so beautiful. I looked at her and said, "Wow!" and she just said, "That's what I do - I sing." That is her giftedness; she's serving this family out of what she's good at, what God put in her heart - that song.

Now I think we have to be really careful because sometimes what happens is we begin to view this as "I have to find that gift. There is a gift, I know I have a gift, I have to go find the gift, and I've got to use that gift."

And what happens is that when we do that, we pass up all sorts of opportunities to serve because we keep searching for that thing.

I want to put it in a different way. Instead of saying, "Find your gift and use it," I want to encourage you to ask yourself, "What *can* I do?" instead of "what *can't* I do?" In other words, David did what he could, which was playing the lyre. He didn't do what he couldn't do.

I've told you this story before, but it was one of the most significant moments of my ministry. In the church I served before I came here; a man had come to Houston to be treated at M.D. Anderson Hospital. They began to attend our church, and we got to know each other a little bit. There came the point when he was moved into hospice care. His wife called me and said, "We'd really like to join the church before he passes away. That means a lot to him."

And I said, "That'd be great, awesome." Then she said, "Then you can come out and visit with us about his memorial service and what he'd like to have there. That would be really special if we could go ahead and do that." I said, "I'd be honored."

So, we brought them into the church, and I called him to make an appointment to come to talk to him at his home. I said, "I'd just like to come to talk to you about your service and what you'd like to have as part of it." Then there was this long pause, and I thought it was strange. Then he said, "Well, okay," and we made the appointment.

I went out to see him, and he was in bed, and I sat down beside his bed. It seemed really awkward, and I could feel how uncomfortable it was in the room. I was thinking, "Maybe he's not ready to talk about his memorial service yet." And then he said, "You know, I've been thinking about what you said on the phone." I said, "Okay," He said, "I really can't do much while I'm in bed, but I can pray, and I can write notes of encouragement. So, if you'll bring me a list of people to pray for and who could use a note of encouragement, then I'll do that."

Then it seemed so out of context but what I'd come to realize was that since he had just joined the church and I'd said, "I'd like to come to talk to you about your service," he thought I meant how he could be *of service*, how he could serve.

I just thought, "Here's a guy asking that question 'Not what I can't do but what *can* I do?'" "What do I have to offer at this moment in this place at this time in this circumstance with who I am? What can I do?"

What if we went around, and this was always the question we asked? What can I do now? How can I help?

He served within his gifts - he did what he could and didn't worry about what he couldn't do.

Here's the second thing I want you to see in this. In verse 23, "And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better..." (1 Samuel 16:23). He served to meet a need. Saul had this evil tormenting spirit, and David just wanted to ease his pain.

I love that movie "Field of Dreams." Kevin Costner plays Ray Kinsella, and he hears these voices that say, "Build it, and they will come." He's going to build the baseball field, and Shoeless Joe Jackson is going to come back and play. It's going to be this wonderful experience. But as they're dealing with all of this challenge, he hears these other voices that say, "Ease his pain. Ease his pain." So, he and his wife are at a PTA meeting, and they hear about a man named Terrence Mann whose books are being banned. They decide that what their job is to go ease Terrence Mann's pain. So, they go on this search for Terrence Mann and find him. At the end of the movie, they find out that the pain they were to ease was his father's pain and, to some extent, his own as that relationship had been difficult.

What would it be like if we heard God say to us, just heard those words "Ease his pain"? And everybody you saw you'd wonder, "Is that the one I'm supposed to ease their pain?" And you did what you could with compassion to serve them. You see, what happens is that most of the time, we try and be fixers. We try to be the ones who say, "I've got the answer for you, and I just want you to become what I want you to become. That's my job, and I'm going to try and convince you to come over to my side to become a part of what I'm a part of. We think we have the answer."

David Kinnaman from the Barna Group wrote a book in 2007 titled *unChristian: a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity And Why It Matters*. And in it, he looks at how predominately young people view the church, view Christianity. His basic premise is that Christianity has an image problem. I think he's right in many ways.

And one of those problems is that we often are viewed as arrogant and self-righteous, that we have all the answers, and we're going to fix everyone else. If only they'd do what we tell them, if they would just believe as we believe, then all would be well. But here's the truth. We are people who believe we have something we want to share with others. We do want others to know the joy, the abundant life that we experience in Jesus Christ. As they say, we want to be like one beggar telling another beggar where to find food. We want to share the gospel with people. But the problem too often is that we approach it without compassion. We approach it

with, "I want to fix you." If instead, our mental picture would be, "I want to serve you. I want to do whatever I can to meet your need. And if you're hungry, I want to feed you. If you're homeless, I want to house you. But I want to ease your pain." What would it be like if that was your mental picture?

That's what David did.

Here's the third thing. Verse 21 says, "...and he became his armor-bearer." (1 Samuel 16:21). I think this is sort of an interesting image. One of the things we need to understand heading into this whole series about King David is the contrast between David and the other kings of Israel. It's that the other kings felt like the people of Israel were there to serve them. And that that was the mental picture for most kings. Kings ruled, and people served the king. With David, that whole thing was inverted. The picture of David as the shepherd boy who became king is that David was the one to serve the people of Israel - that he was the servant king. That became his identity as the one who serves.

Now we see Jesus as one who comes from the line of David, and that extension as Jesus is the fulfillment of that servant king. The Scripture in Philippians 2 says it so beautifully: "Though being the very nature of God, he did not count equality with God as something to be grasped. But rather, he made himself nothing - he emptied himself, taking the identity of a servant."

Being born in human form, he became obedient, even to the death. That was his identity as the one who served. He tells his disciples, "The Son of man came not to be served but to serve." When we understand servanthood as our identity.

If you're ordained a United Methodist pastor, the bishop lays hands upon you, and you're ordained. It isn't just a matter of a new vocation. It's not just a new job. It's about our identity as being a pastor. It's about who you are. Whether you're in a job or not, you're still a United Methodist pastor.

My grandfather was a pastor, and so is my father-in-law. On my grandfather's gravestone is a little disc that says "Methodist Minister" with a little disc, and it's the same with my father-in-law. He's not passed away, but when he does, he'll be buried beside his wife, and on the gravestone, there is the same disc and label. It's a way of saying, "This is who I am. This is my identity."

When you become baptized as a Christian, your identity is that of servant. You, as a child of God, receive your ministry in your baptism. So, it becomes your mindset that, "I want to be a servant. I'm going to act as a servant in whatever context I am." It isn't just, "Today, I'm going to serve here, and tomorrow I'll serve there." It's like "that's who I am and what I do."

If you're a mother, you're always a mother. If you're a father, you're always a father. That's part of your identity. Now our core identity is as a child of God. And when we're baptized, we're given that identity as one who serves.

The third thing was David served as his identity. Here's the fourth one. In v. 21, the whole verse says, "...Saul loved him greatly...and he became his armor-bearer." (1 Samuel 16:21) Saul loved him greatly. He served in relationship.

That's the thing about Christian service. It's not just about helping someone; it's about building a relationship with them.

My wife and I laugh, and our whole family does about how one time we were at the Macaroni Grill. You know that when you're a waiter there, and you're going to wait on someone if you want to get a really good tip, you don't just want to provide good service, you also want to develop a relationship - a tacit one - but where the customer likes you. Then you have this relationship, and the customer says, "Hey, I really like him - give him a good tip."

One time we are at Macaroni Grill, and we're sitting down eating dinner, and the waiter is very chatty with us. Then ultimately, he grabs a chair, pulls it over to the table and sits down, and begins to talk to us. We're wondering - "what's he doing?" It was pretty funny, but a bit over the top in terms of building that relationship. But I thought to myself, "As Christians, our job is not just to serve in the sense of helping you but to serve in the sense of relationship - to build that relationship with you in any way we can."

Here's what that means. Once we own servanthood as an identity, then that means that we serve every place. Often, we think of "Hey, how am I going to serve, and what organizations should I sign up for? What project am I going to sign up for to help at the school? How am I going to help at the Little League and in the community, and certainly in the church?" And all of that is important that we do all those things, but service in relationship is so much more than that. We serve at home; we serve our children. If we're married, we serve our spouse. We serve our friends. If you really want to be in a great friendship, then you want to serve your friends. If you really want to be in a great marriage, then you want to serve your spouse.

At a certain point, we begin to serve our parents. The whole crux of the Christian relationship is that we serve the people around us who we love. That love and servanthood go hand in hand.

Jim Elkins was a member of St. Luke's, and he passed away about ten years ago this year. He was a remarkable man and was on so many boards - of hospitals, and he worked in the parks system here in Houston, and on the board of corporations and organizations. Just his achievements were so many, and he made such an impact on so many people. The sanctuary and the whole church were filled when he passed away. But the thing I remember most about him was not all those great accomplishments but the way he served his family. I remember this from his memorial service: "As the sun peers over the horizon, it's time for Jim to wake up the rest of the house. He prepares for each of the family members a favorite morning beverage—coffee for some, orange juice for others, chocolate milk for Buck, peach tea for Lucy. Then Jim moves into each child's room and the master bedroom, often singing some rather silly song to set the day off in the right spirit. A song which might go something like this: 'O the cow kicked Nellie in the belly in the barn, O the cow kicked Nellie in the belly in the barn, and the doctor said it would do no harm. Second verse same as the first. Couldn't get better so it's got to get worse.'"

Servanthood is what you do everywhere. And you do it primarily with the people you love.

Here's the fourth thing, and maybe it's the most important. In verse 19 it says, "So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, 'Send me your son David who is with the sheep.' Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a kid and sent them by his son David to Saul. And David came to Saul and entered his service..." (1 Samuel 16:21).

So, David was sent. We serve as people who are sent.

Here at St. Luke's, we like to talk about making apostles, not just making disciples. There's a difference. At the end of Matthew 9 and the beginning of Matthew 10 is sort of a theme verse for us here at St. Luke's. The Scripture says that when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them for "they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd." So, he calls his disciples to him, and he gives them authority, and he sends them out. And now the twelve are called apostles, not disciples. The word apostle literally means one who is sent.

We are people who are sent to serve. We don't just gather to serve; we are sent to serve. In this Covid-19 time, it's been interesting because it has forced us to remember that the church has to leave the building. That the church is not just this place you come to; the church isn't the

building. It isn't even the gathering in the building. The church is a mission; it is a people who are sent to carry that light into the darkness.

Sometimes I take my grandkids to the park to play, and I'll sit on a bench, and they'll be out playing on the playground. There's this rhythm, and you can see it. It's not just with me but the other parents who are there. The kids will play, then they'll run over to their parents, and they'll have some interchange, then they'll go back out again. Then they'll run back over to their parents, have an interchange, and then they'll go back out and play again. That's sort of the rhythm of the church. We gather in, even if it's a virtual gathering, and then out we go. We're sent out to serve, to carry that light out into the darkness.

At the end of every worship service, we have a benediction, and that benediction is to offer peace to the people, but it's also a charge, a sending forth. And it always begins with a single word - "Go!" There may be different words that follow, but it's almost always "Go!" You are a people who are sent.

So, when this service is over, you are sent.

Go! Go and serve the world and carry the light into the darkness. Serve within your giftedness, do what you can do, not what you can't. Serve to meet the need, ease their pain. Serve as your identity, in every place you go and, in every way, and in every opportunity that you have. Serve in relationship of love with others. But go!

Let's pray together. *Gracious God, in our baptism, you made us servants. And as we seek to live and love like your Son Jesus, who claimed that identity of servant, who came to serve and not be served. We pray that by your Holy Spirit, you would transform us and that you would pour into us that spirit and awaken our own gifts that we might use them to carry the light into the darkness. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.*

Hear now this benediction. Go, bear witness to the love of God in this world so that those to whom love is a stranger will find in you generous friends. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen