

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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Re-Center: A Mission to Serve
Romans 12:1-8

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Last week, we began a 4-week teaching series we are calling Re-Center: Staying on course with Jesus. When we talk about staying on course with Jesus, we are simply referring to the fact that being a follower of Jesus essentially means that we are following Jesus on His mission.

You see, Jesus didn't come to this earth as a man merely to visit. He came on a mission. He came to accomplish a work that only He could do. Last week, we saw that the mission of Jesus is to seek and save people who are lost. Jesus came to rescue people who are lost and separated from God because of their sin. That's how our journey with Jesus begins – He comes to our lives and saves us through His mercy and grace as we trust in Him. And He commands us to join Him on His mission.

Over the next three weeks, we want to unpack some of what it looks like to live on mission with Jesus. There are three things we will be focusing on: serving, sharing, and giving. A life lived on mission with Jesus will include serving, sharing, and giving.

And today, we want to focus on serving. Why would we say serving is a significant part of living on mission with Jesus? Listen to the words of Jesus from the Gospel of Mark.

Mark 10:45

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

In this passage, the disciples of Jesus are arguing about who should be considered Jesus' right hand man. They want to know which of them is the greatest so that they can figure out who gets to tell the others what to do.

But Jesus says that kind of thinking is completely opposed to the way His followers should live because it's completely opposed to the way Jesus lived. When Jesus came to live as a man in a body on this earth, He came on a mission to serve people. He came to meet their needs. And His ultimate act of service was a work that met our deepest need: He gave His life as a ransom to rescue us from the power and penalty of sin.

And He calls us to follow Him into that same life of sacrificial service. In John 13, just before He went to the cross, Jesus knelt down and washed His disciples' feet. Listen to the words of Jesus as He talked about being a servant...

John 13:15, 35

*For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you...
...By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

The people of this world who are lost in their sin and separated from God will know that we are followers of Jesus by our sacrificial service flowing from a heart of authentic love.

In other words, the mission of Jesus advances to the people of this world through people who display the love of Jesus through sacrificial service.

And that brings us to our text for this morning. It's a passage that gives us clear teaching on what it looks like to serve as part of the body of Christ in this world.

Romans 12:3-8

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Let's start by making some observations of this text.

1. Every Believer is Member of Christ's Body

Romans 12:5

so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

The phrase "body of Christ" is a common phrase in the New Testament and it's talking about the church – the community of people who are trusting in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

And as you study the New Testament, you find that there are two ways the church is described. There is the Universal Church that is made up of all believers in Christ.

Ephesians 1:22-23

And He put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

That's a reference to the universal church. (Mt 16:18 – I will build my church...) Jesus is the head over all things to all believers everywhere. But the church is most often a reference to individual, local communities of believers.

Galatians 1:1-2

Paul, an apostle...to the churches of Galatia:

The universal church is comprised of individual, local communities of believers who have committed to live out the call of Christ with one another. We call those "local churches." First Baptist Church is a local church. We are a community of believers who are part of the body of Christ.

Jesus still lives in and through a body on earth. He lives in and through us – His church. And that includes you if you are a believer.

2. Every Member of Christ's Body has a Purpose

Romans 12:4

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,

This is not complicated. Our physical bodies are comprised of individual parts that have specific designs and functions. Our hands are designed to function a certain way. Our lungs are designed to function a certain way. All the parts vary in design, but all are necessary and serve a purpose.

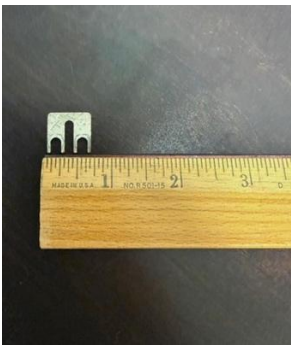
Imagine trying to play baseball with 11 right fielders – you’d have right field covered but no one to pitch or catch or cover the rest of the field. The different positions are different by design. They make the team a team. Or imagine trying to have an orchestra where everyone wanted to play first trumpet. As a guy who played trumpet in our school band, I can tell you that would be a nightmare for so many reasons. All the parts of an orchestra are different by design. The diversity and harmony of sounds is the very thing that makes the music beautiful.

And that’s how it is with the body of Christ. If you are a follower of Jesus, you are designed by God to be a part of a local church – the body of Christ. You have unique strengths and abilities that God has designed so that this church family can advance His mission in a powerful, beautiful, and effective way.

Every member matters. And quite often, it’s the one that no one sees or thinks about that makes all the difference.

When we renovated the sanctuary, one of the primary goals was to improve the sound so that the congregation could understand the speaker. Bose actually took on the challenge of this room precisely so they could use it as a featured project on their website. You never want to be the “before picture” for anything, but that’s where we were.

Then the day came for us to have the first demonstration of the new sound system after the renovation. Engineers and industry professionals were here. You could see all the big components were in place to improve the sound – the new speakers, the acoustic panels on the ceiling and walls, the curtain system above and behind the stage. All the big stuff was in place. Then, they fired it up and did some initial mixing...and it wasn’t good. It wasn’t good at all. Nothing worked properly. It was wonderful feeling. After several days of searching, someone finally found the problem.



It was a small clip on the speakers (about the size of a dime) that wasn’t where it was supposed to be.

I keep that clip on my desk in my office. It reminds me that often the biggest, most important things are things that appear small or are unseen.

And that’s how it is in the body of Christ. Every person has a design and serves a purpose. And it matters that every part is where it’s supposed to be.

And I'm not just talking about plugging into a program. The reality is there are people who are unable to participate in much of our programmed ministry. For instance, we have hundreds of shut-ins who watch our services every week. They can't come to House of Hope or participate in children's ministry. But they still serve. They pray for us and write notes for us. They are unseen but they aren't unimportant. They are right where the Lord has them, faithfully doing what they are able to do. And that's the call of Christ for all of us. Look at how verse 6 says it...

Romans 12:6

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them:

The expectation of every follower of Jesus is that they would use whatever gifts they've been given to serve as part of the body of Christ.

So, how are you using your God-given gifts to serve in Christ's church? That's not an optional part of the Christian life or the mission of Christ. And time won't permit me to list all the opportunities there are to serve as part of this church family. You can serve in...Preschool ministry, children's ministry, student ministry, men's ministry, women's ministry, music ministry, English as Second Language, House of Hope, Agape Women's Center. You can be a greeter at the doors or a golf cart driver. You can be a Sunday school teacher. You can be part of our prayer group. You can serve widows and shut ins. You can visit nursing homes.

And those are just some of the programs we have as a church. But, even more, there are countless ways to serve others just by building relationships with other believers through small groups and ministries. You can provide meals for young families who have new babies. You can call people from your small groups to encourage them and pray for them. You can invite people over for dinner and fellowship. There are countless ways to serve as part of this body.

If you need help finding a spot, just talk with one of our pastors or ministry leaders after the service or call our church office and set up a time to talk. Or, you can go to our website, click on the connect tab, and select "serve." (here's a link to that page: <https://www.fbcmi.com/serve>). We want every part of Christ's body to have every opportunity possible to live out God's design for their lives. But this passage isn't merely a call to serve. There's something deeper going on here.

3. Serving is a matter of the Heart not the Hands.

Romans 12:8

the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Paul is pointing to our motives. This isn't just a call to serve; it's a call to serve with the right attitude of heart. Don't just contribute. Contribute with a spirit of generosity. Don't just lead. Lead with zeal. Don't just do acts of mercy. Do them with cheerfulness. Serving as part of Christ's body isn't primarily about the work of our hands, it's about the condition of our hearts. You also see that in verse 3.

Romans 12:3

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Paul is pressing into the heart of Christ-like service. And he pinpoints the number one thing that keeps us from serving like Jesus – selfish pride. And there are at least two ways selfish pride impacts our service.

First, it causes us to not serve at all because we only care about ourselves. Sometimes, pride says, “I don’t need to serve you.” As long as our needs are met by others, then we are good. That’s nothing like Jesus. But it’s rampant in the American Church where people shop for churches based on what they want to get out of it without any thought about how Christ desires for them to be part of contributing. That type of consumerism isn’t biblical Christianity.

And there’s another way selfish pride impacts our service. It doesn’t keep us from serving, it causes us to serve for our own good. Sometimes, pride says, “I’ll serve you, but only if serving you serves me.” You know what I’m talking about. Just like consumerism is all about what we get out of it, there’s a kind of “service” that is all about what we get out of it. It’s the guy who gives money to a homeless person because he knows someone from church is watching and he wants to appear loving and generous. It’s not about caring for the people you are serving, it’s about something you get out of it. There are countless ways this takes shape...

For instance, it’s a really sweet thing to clean someone’s room for them. But there’s something known as “revenge cleaning.” Here’s a scenario that may or may not have happened in my life. Your kid is supposed to clean their room that has been an absolute wreck for multiple presidential administrations. They keep saying they are going to do it but it never gets done. At some point they want to go out with their friends, but you pull out the phrase they teach at secret parent meetings – “You aren’t going anywhere until that room is cleaned.”

The kid heads into their room and comes out 30 seconds later declaring, “It’s clean!” They run out the door before you have a chance to look at it. While they’re gone, you casually walk by and see that everything was indiscriminately shoved under the bed or crammed into the closet. You spend the next 2 hours in a deep clean fueled by parental rage, bitterness, and caffeine. Whispering under your breath, “I’ll show you clean, little missy.” “You think that bed is made, I’ll make it so tight you’ll never get back in it.”

You cleaned their room. You did something for them. That’s something love might do. But you didn’t do it out of love. You did it out of bitterness and anger.

Paul is saying the body of Christ shouldn’t serve like that because Christ never serves like that. That’s why verse 9 says, “Let love be genuine.” In other words, you are called to serve in and as the body of Christ with the motive of genuinely loving other people more than yourself. Loving others like Jesus has loved you.

- Ask yourself if that’s how you serve.
- Do I serve when no one else sees?
- Do I serve when no one gives me applause?
- Do I serve when no one will pay me back or when it inconveniences me?
- Do I serve because I really love the people I’m serving?

Serving like Jesus is so much more than just volunteering an hour a week or checking in and out of the programs of a church. Serving like Jesus is about being like Jesus. It’s about living like Jesus because we think and feel like Jesus.

And that takes our text to a whole new level. How can we actually make that happen? How can we save ourselves from pride and selfishness and consumerism? How can we manufacture zeal and generosity and compassion and affection and love that motivates Christ-like service? The answer is that we can't. That's why we need Jesus. And we don't just need Him, we have Him as we trust in Him. Go back to verses 1-2:

Romans 12:1-2:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

These two verses are a sermon series in themselves. But I just want to point out that everything Paul has to say about serving in the body of Christ flows from these two verses. And everything Paul says in these two verses is written in light of the mercies of God. The first 11 chapters of Romans are a rich description of the mercies God has poured out on us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. By His mercy...

- He saves us from our sin.
- He restores us to God the Father.
- He makes us part of His covenant people.
- He works all things together for our good.
- He fills us with His Spirit.
- He changes and transforms our hearts and minds.
- He liberates us from the power of pride and selfishness and produces love and zeal and compassion in us.

As we place our faith and trust in Jesus, all of God's mercies are poured out upon our lives. That's the only way we can serve others the way Jesus calls us to serve. And that gives us our big idea for this morning:

Authentic Service flows from the Merciful Work of Jesus in us.

The only way for us to put our lives to work in serving others is to depend on the merciful work of Jesus in us. The biggest question for all of us this morning isn't about the work we do in serving others – it's about the work Jesus has done for us. We cannot pour out service to others until we experience the mercy of God being poured into us through faith in Jesus.

A couple years ago, I was helping out at a banquet. My job was to go around to the tables and refill people's water glasses. But, at one point, I ran out of water. On my way back to the kitchen, I had to pass by dozens of people who were sitting at a banquet with no water to drink...and I couldn't do anything about it because I was walking around with an empty pitcher. I had to go back to the source and get myself refilled before I could refill anyone else.

And that's how it is with serving like Jesus. The only way we have anything to pour out is if we are being filled by the Source. The Christian life isn't about working hard to produce love and generosity and zeal by our own power. It's about being connected to Christ through faith and fill with His Spirit so that His mercy will flow in us and overflow to those around us.

And that only happens as we place our faith and trust in Him and continually lay our lives down before Him as living sacrifices so we can be transformed by His power.

And that brings us to the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a celebration of the mercy of God to us in Jesus. The bread and juice represent the body and blood of Christ. Jesus suffered and died at the cross – His body was broken and His blood was shed – as He bore the punishment we deserved for our sin. Because Jesus died in our place, we can receive all the mercies of God.

So, look to Jesus. Not only as the greatest example of love that serves, but as the source of every mercy you need to be set free from sin and restored to God and empowered to serve.

Taking the Lord's Supper is a way to publicly acknowledge our faith in Jesus...