

Isaiah 53:4-12

- ⁴ It was certainly our sickness that he carried,
and our sufferings that he bore,
but we thought him afflicted,
struck down by God and tormented.
- ⁵ He was pierced because of our rebellions
and crushed because of our crimes.
He bore the punishment that made us whole;
by his wounds we are healed.
- ⁶ Like sheep we had all wandered away,
each going its own way,
but the LORD let fall on him all our crimes.
- ⁷ He was oppressed and tormented,
but didn't open his mouth.
Like a lamb being brought to slaughter,
like a ewe silent before her shearers,
he didn't open his mouth.
- ⁸ Due to an unjust ruling he was taken away,
and his fate—who will think about it?
He was eliminated from the land of the living,
struck dead because of my people's rebellion.
- ⁹ His grave was among the wicked,
his tomb with evildoers,^[a]
though he had done no violence,
and had spoken nothing false.
- ¹⁰ But the LORD wanted to crush him
and to make him suffer.
If his life is offered^[a] as restitution,
he will see his offspring; he will enjoy long life.
The LORD's plans will come to fruition through him.
- ¹¹ After his deep anguish he will see light,^[a] and he will be satisfied.
Through his knowledge, the righteous one, my servant,
will make many righteous,
and will bear their guilt.

¹² Therefore, I will give him a share with the great,
and he will divide the spoil with the strong,
in return for exposing his life to death
and being numbered with rebels,
though he carried the sin of many
and pleaded on behalf of those who rebelled.

Mark 10:35-45

³⁵ James and John, Zebedee's sons, came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

³⁶ "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

³⁷ They said, "Allow one of us to sit on your right and the other on your left when you enter your glory."

³⁸ Jesus replied, "You don't know what you're asking! Can you drink the cup I drink or receive the baptism I receive?"

³⁹ "We can," they answered.

Jesus said, "You will drink the cup I drink and receive the baptism I receive, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left hand isn't mine to give. It belongs to those for whom it has been prepared."

⁴¹ Now when the other ten disciples heard about this, they became angry with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them over and said, "You know that the ones who are considered the rulers by the Gentiles show off their authority over them and their high-ranking officials order them around. ⁴³ But that's not the way it will be with you. Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant. ⁴⁴ Whoever wants to be first among you will be the slave of all, ⁴⁵ for the Human One [\[e\]](#) didn't come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people."

Sermon

<https://vimeo.com/119893137>

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Here we are, into our second week of our series on stewardship. Thanks for coming back! I love this video that we just watched for two reasons. First, it's a cartoon! All of us need to be reminded of the joy of childhood, especially when we're discussing heavy things like stewardship. The other reason I love this video is because it works well to connect last week's sermon to this one. Last week, we talked about the importance of time, as God gave us that time to live for others and find abundant life not only for ourselves, but for all creation. If you missed that one, it's available on our website. This week, we turn to our talents, the things that we do with that time. When we use our time well, we put our talents to the service of others.

Now, let's talk about that word for a second. Talents. When we hear the word talent, we might think of a variety show, where people show off their best skills. Surely, those are talents, but I don't want to limit our discussion to that concept. When we say talent in this context we're talking about any skill or gift or ability that you bring that can be used to give life to others. This means that changing diapers and taking out the garbage is just as important as playing an instrument or painting a picture. Talent, in the Christian sense, is anything that you do that gives life to others.

Take a look at the Gospel passage again from today. We find James and John arguing about who Jesus will put at his side in the kingdom, selfishly seeking a place of privilege above everyone else. Though these two are amongst his best friends, Jesus immediately puts the kibosh on this. Why? Because they just don't understand why kingdom life is like. They're focusing their talents on

themselves and their privilege. But we're called not to become rulers, who expect others to work for them or to work only for themselves, but servants, who expect to live life in service of others.

“Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant. Whoever wants to be first among you will be the slave of all, for the Human One didn't come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people.” Greatness in the Christian life is service. That's the message that Jesus brings us today, but do we believe it? Let's be honest. When greatness comes to mind, the first thing that comes to mind most often isn't a servant. Maybe a professional athlete or prominent politician. Perhaps Bill Gates or Steve Jobs, depending on your computer processing preferences. Perhaps a famous author like Maya Angelou or an incredible musician like Louie Armstrong. And these people are surely great at what they do. But this kind

of fame, and the money, and the influence don't make someone great in the context of God's kingdom. Greatness in God's kingdom is measured by the use of our talents in service of others.

Really Jesus? Are you sure? That's how I feel at this point. The greatness we see in the world is attractive. We want that stuff, or at least I do! Whether it's being recognized or being wealthy or being powerful, all of that sounds pretty good. Sometimes, and we can be honest about this, we wonder whether God truly understands the kind of life we lead, about what we'd have to give up to live the life of a servant.

Of course, before we get ahead of ourselves, we must remember that Jesus also faced these temptations. In the wilderness, Satan tempted him with authority, with money, with fame. And each time, Jesus showed us that the way to true fame is choosing a life of service over a life of worldly

wealth. And even more than this, the words of Isaiah should be ringing in our ears as we remember the kind of service Jesus gave to us. "It was certainly our sickness that he carried, and our sufferings that he bore, but we thought him afflicted, struck down by God and tormented. He was pierced because of our rebellions and crushed because of our crimes. He bore the punishment that made us whole; by his wounds we are healed. Like sheep we had all wandered away, but the LORD took on himself all our crimes." That's the incredible service that Jesus offers to the whole world. The talent that Jesus used on our behalf was everything, the fullness of his life and death, so that we might live life in the resurrection with him.

That's why this video talked about stewardship as giving of yourself, because when we talk about the talents we share, we're talking about sharing the things that make up our lives. The songs we sing and the meals we make, the

words we use and the cars we drive, everything that we do to occupy our time can be a talent used to give life to someone else. Just as Jesus gave the fullness of himself for the life of the world, so too we're called to use the fullness of our talents to bring life to our community.

Here's the beautiful thing about the stewardship of talent. We're not called to stop doing the good things that we love. We called to use those good things to bring joy to others as well. One church men's group I know of used to have a super bowl party every year, which was nice enough, but it was just about themselves. Then they began to hose a party at a local residential facility for people with intellectual disabilities, for those who loved football but didn't have a wide network of worldly friends. That's stewardship of talent, redirecting your joy to bless others as well.

How can we, as a church, use our talents to bring joy to others as well as ourselves? Bernadette McBride did that wonderfully last week, as she cooked a wonderful meal for Highlander Lutherans. Her joy of cooking blessed college students who almost never taste a homemade meal during the semester. That's using your talents to bless others. Mike Gaudreau is working on creating a beautiful new font for our worship space that incorporates the original marble font, making it moveable and giving it a larger bowl. His joy of workmanship and artistry will help preserve the heritage of this church as well as make it more usable for future years to come. That's using your talents to bless others. To become good stewards of our talents, we should follow the examples of these faithful servants and use the talents we love to bless the community that we love.

However, I don't want to oversimplify this process. Just as Jesus ultimately had to face the cross, our servanthood

will also sometimes be uncomfortable, will be painful, will be difficult. But it is no less Christ-like, and in fact, sometimes is necessary to alleviate the sufferings of others. Tre Haga, one of our college students, did that last week, when he came with me to visit Ilene in the emergency room after she fell and broke her arm. Rather than go and work on his own homework, he came to the ER, which is no one's favorite place to be, to encourage a woman who he's only known for less than two months. When I asked what led him to do that, he said, "Well, I don't know. I suppose it was just the right thing to do." That's a sign of the church, of God's holy spirit growing good stewards in our midst. His servanthood didn't miraculously heal her arm, but it brought a sense of community and compassion to her hospital bed. That's stewardship of our talents, choosing to bring joy to someone else who is facing a difficult or painful situation, even when it brings difficulty or anxiety to ourselves.

As we consider our roles as stewards in this community, we must follow this self-sacrificial lead. We're called to be servants, living on behalf of others. As we decide how we'll use the talents that we have to share, we're not called to the easy tasks. We're called to the meaningful tasks, to the life-giving tasks, even if they're inconvenient, difficult, or painful for us. But that's where the greatness of the Christian life is, in the service of others. What's so great about that?

We've already been served by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The talents that we have to give only exist because Jesus offers us eternal forgiveness and restores us to abundant life. The greatness of God is found in the service of the cross, and so we, the images of God, are called to reenact that greatness, serving others and pointing to the cross. We do this with the things that we love, and sometimes the things that we know we must do despite

the difficulty. But we do this. We do this because Jesus lived for us, and so we're called to live for others. Amen.

<https://vimeo.com/20645249> (for Reformation Sunday)