

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: THANK YOU

Lesson: Mark 10:35-45

³⁵ *Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."*

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

³⁷ *They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."*

³⁸ *"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"*

³⁹ *"We can," they answered.*

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

⁴¹ *When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must 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 as a ransom for many."*

(Slide 1) Today is Laity Sunday. Not only pastors but all laypeople are called by God. That's why you are here today, serving God together in the church. Today is a day to celebrate, give thanks, and also receive thanks for the roles, hard work, and dedication you have given in service to God.

I believe it's important to express ourselves well, especially in our relationships with others. It is essential to express gratitude properly. No matter how thankful we may feel toward those serving the church and toward one another, if that gratitude isn't expressed, the recipients may never know. So, I encourage you, during this time, to turn to those around you and express your thanks by saying, "Thank you for serving" or "Thank you for your dedication."

Your presence here today, your love for this church, and your dedication in leading and serving this church have enabled it to continue to be well-maintained. Thank you.

Every two weeks, I meet online with several pastors from the Wisconsin Conference for a book club. Through these meetings, I reflect on my ministry and gain new insights. In one recent session, we discussed lay leadership, and one pastor expressed gratitude for the lay leaders in his congregation. However, he also mentioned that at times, he feels concerned when he sees these leaders grow tired and weary after serving for such a long period.

Ideally, in our Conference, leadership terms last for three years, with a transition every three years. This allows leaders to rest and recharge. However, in smaller churches, when leadership transitions occur and there are no suitable replacements, one person may end up carrying multiple roles. In some cases, leadership can extend to five, ten, or even fifteen years.

Although you serve out of love for the church without expecting rewards, there may be times when your efforts and dedication feel taken for granted, unrecognized, and that's when weariness can set in. But I encourage you to remember that every moment you've spent serving others, every potato you've boiled to provide a warm meal, every dish and cup you've washed after events, every box you packed and cleaned up after a thrift sale, every regular church meeting you attended, every time you remained at church to provide beautiful music during worship, every bell practice you've done to bring beauty to the church, every pancake served to neighbors, every hour spent in the food pantry or preparing pillowcases for the homeless and abused, every moment you prepared Sunday School lessons and led the children in faith, and every time you've handled the church's finances—God sees all of these moments. He treasures every second you've spent in service to Him.

(Slide 2) In today's Scripture from Mark 10, we read about James and John, disciples of Jesus. They were fishermen from Bethsaida, a town in Galilee. While Jerusalem was the center of Israel, Bethsaida was a border town, home to the marginalized, the poor, and the sick. James and John, too, were among the poor, making their living by catching fish each day. It was a life without much hope or dreams.

But then, Jesus appeared. They were preparing to fish as usual when Jesus called them. Though they had never met Him before, they felt an undeniable authority in His call. So, they immediately left their nets, their families, and their livelihood to follow Him.

At first, perhaps they thought they might leave if things didn't work out with Jesus. But that concern soon proved unnecessary. As they followed Jesus, they witnessed miracles they never could have imagined. They saw the sick healed, the multitudes fed with just five loaves and two fish, and Jesus transformed before their eyes, wearing the brightest white robes as He stood with Moses and Elijah. Any doubts they had about following Him were erased. To them, following Jesus felt like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity—a chance for their lives to be completely transformed.

They believed Jesus would soon become the political Messiah and king of Jerusalem, and so they approached Him, asking if they could sit at His right and left hand when He came into His kingdom. They were looking for power and status in this world through their connection to Jesus.

When the other disciples heard about this, they were outraged. Why? Because they, too, were hoping for their own "life-changing" moment through Jesus and felt they had been beaten to the punch by James and John.

But Jesus used this moment to teach them about true discipleship and what it really means to serve.

(Slide 3) As I reflect on this story, I'm reminded of the children's book, *The Giving Tree*. At the heart of the story is a tree and a boy. As a child, the boy finds joy in the tree's shade, eats its apples, and swings from its branches. But as the boy grows older, he needs more. The tree gives him its apples to sell for money, its branches to build a house, and eventually, when the boy is old and tired, all the tree has left is its stump for the boy to sit on and rest.

When I first read this book as a child, I thought it was just a nice story about a generous tree. But reading it again as an adult, I saw the deep love and selflessness in the tree's actions.

In the same way, the love and care you've received from your parents or guardians helped bring you to where you are today. And just like that tree, there has been one more person who has given everything for us—Jesus Christ.

(Slide 4) Jesus said: "...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:43b-45)

There may be moments when leading and serving feels fulfilling and joyful, but there will also be times of stress and weariness. Yet God sees your quiet, humble service. He knows how significant and valuable your work is. The essence of love is in giving. May God's love refresh and restore each of you, so that, until we meet Him face to face, we too can live as disciples of Jesus Christ, sharing the love we have received with others in this world. Thank you and Amen.