

“Great Servants”

Deuteronomy 10:12-21;

Romans 12:9-16; Mark 10:35-45

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You might think that we have done a lot of piling on in one day. We have Stewardship Sunday, All Saints Day, and the beginning day of a new mini-series on service. Each of those could be a conversation in and of itself, but I do believe that there's a way they all fit together well. As I was thinking about what it means to have both Stewardship and All Saints Day on the same day, it reminded me of all those who have gone before and their stewardship and how it has allowed us to be where we are. What they have given of themselves, the gifts that they shared – their resources, their time, their talents, their energy – are the foundations on which we build our church and our lives. So as we think about what we do for stewardship, we remember what those who have gone before us have done as well.

As we are thinking about those who have gone before us, we generally think about particular things. If you are like me, generally when I remember those who have gone before, I like to think about the positive things, the good that they have done, all that they have offered our lives. Sometimes that takes a little filtering, sometimes a lot of filtering, and sometimes not so much. But there is that sense, as we look back on those who have gone before, that we appreciate particular things—the goodness that their life brought to our lives. It would be fun to have you sit there for a moment and think about people who you really appreciate who have gone before and the characteristics they had that you really appreciate because they are a model for us, a guide in helping us see. Thinking about that help us think about what is really important to us and what we want in our lives and who we want to be.

Some of these passages today talk about God encouraging us to be particular kinds of people. In Deuteronomy it talks about how God encourages us to serve him and love him, and how he cares about justice and love. There are some ideas about what God would think would be important for us. Then if we look at the passage from Romans, we could go down that list and see the variety of things there—let love be genuine. The people who really matter to me—their love is genuine and there is a mutual affection. They don't mind sharing and showing honor for someone else, caring about another. They are often ardent in spirit. They rejoice in hope and are patient and persevere. Think about all these characteristics that I think are wonderful in folks in my own life that have gone before. There's a sense of living in harmony and not being haughty. How many of those things would show up on your list of things that you think about in people who have given your life something that is really good? It feels to me like that is what God is calling us to. It's the essence of responding to God. That's what stewardship is about—responding to God.

As Claire gave the children's message today, she went back to her grandparents in thinking about the saints that have gone before. As I was looking at the models that I have in my life and those who have gone before, I thought of my grandfather on my

mother's side. We used to visit my grandparents at Christmas time or other times of the year. We would make that long trip from the middle of Nebraska all the way across Iowa to go visit and spend time with my grandpa and grandma. One thing in particular I remember about my grandpa was that he had been a plasterer, and he loved to drive around town and point out buildings where he had done the work. He would talk about how he had plastered or put up stone façades on buildings. He wasn't famous, but he cared about what he did. Back then, they had to plaster a wall instead of putting up wall board like we do today. In fact, if you go down the stairs here, you can see plastered walls. My grandpa would have to plaster in a way that made sure that the plaster was on just right, and how the wall turned out depended on how good you were at doing that. He took pride in what he did. He cared about his work and the people he worked for, and I saw that in his life. I can't look at plasterer's tools without thinking of him, and how they have become a symbol for me of caring for others and doing that good work.

As I think about him and how he showed me a way of caring and living, it wasn't just the work he did. When I was in high school, my grandparents came to our town to live. Grandpa had to go to the nursing home, and Grandma came to live with us. But every now and then we would have him over for dinner. The love he showed my grandmother was genuine love, that mutual affection. He was a person who wasn't famous or rich, but who ever showed his faith and his grace.

As Jesus talks to his disciples, I think a little bit about my grandfather. He wasn't someone who would end up at Jesus' right or left hand, but that's not what Jesus asks, is it? He simply asks that we do the good he calls us to, that we use the gifts God has given us to do the good work, to care for one another, to show genuine love and mutual affection, to use our gifts for the good of all and to do so as servants.

Jesus calls us to be great—great servants. Think about the people in your life. I know that in my life it has been those people who have shown themselves to be great servants who are important, who make my life, who make our lives, great. Amen.

Lord, we recognize the grace you have given us as we remember those who have gone before, the good work that they have done, and the foundations they have laid that we may continue to build upon. I don't know who it is in each of our lives, yet you enter in through those folks, those models for us. We hear Jesus call us to serve one another. We recognize the characteristics of that service, the genuine love and the mutual affection, the weeping with those who weep, the rejoicing with those who rejoice. Lord, you call us to be great servants. We thank you for those great servants who have gone before us. Lord, guide us to be your great servants. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.