

10:00 AM, Sept. 17, 2023
16th Sunday after Pentecost
Pastor Tim Huber

“Getting Off Our ‘Buts”

Grace, mercy & peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Last Sunday, we took a look at the **WHAT, WHERE, and WHY** of God’s **CHURCH**, and we concluded that the immobile, plastic, **LEGO** church model wasn’t exactly what God had in mind for the people of His church! **Today**, I want us to examine the **ONE THING** for which God’s church **IS** to be known, and for which Christ **HIMSELF** is our primary **EXAMPLE!** It’s called **SERVANTHOOD.**

I believe God’s redeemed people truly **do** want to live a life of significance; they want to **SERVE** at points of real **NEED** and make a **DIFFERENCE** with their life. **You’d** say that about yourself, **wouldn’t** you? I mean, have you ever heard **anybody** in this church say, *“I want to leave the world in **WORSE** condition than it was before I got here...even if I **DID** have a chance to make it better. **OR...I enjoy **BEING ABLE** to do something for God...but then purposefully choosing **NOT** to!”*** Nobody says those kinds of things around here! We **WANT** to serve in order to make a difference. And yet, so many times...we **DON’T!** Why is that? Why **don’t** far more people in God’s **CHURCH**—His **Forever Family**—deeply **invest** themselves into doing something **meaningful** in terms of their **servicing** nature with their daily life? **Particularly** when—if you’d **ask** them—they’d say that’s the very thing they **WOULD** like to do!

Well, to be **blunt**, the answer is that many of us believers just never get off our **‘buts’!** **NO!** Not **“butt”** with the double **“T”**—not our **“gluteus maximus”** (although a case might be made for that kind of **“butt”**, as well!) **HERE**, however, we’re using the **CONJUNCTION** with only **one “T”**, referring to the **“buts”** introducing the nature of our **fears, hesitations and excuses** for **not** serving, such as *“**But, what if I fail?**”* *“**But, I wouldn’t know where or how or what to do!**”* *“**But I don’t have that kind of time **OR** money!**”* *“**BUT I doubt if I could make any difference anyway!**”* *“**BUT I think I’ve already **DONE** my part.**”* And just as Jesus warned His sleepy-headed disciples in the Gethsemane that, *“**The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak**”*, our **willingness** (or **LACK** there of), as well as our **EFFECTIVENESS** to serve **wavers** with one **“but”** after another, **because we never seem to get “OFF our ‘buts”** and **ON** with our active **SERVANTHOOD!**

You know, when most people think of Jesus, they think of the mighty **miracles** and the teaching **parables** and charismatic **conversations**, but what’s often overlooked is how His life always was **marked** by something few take note of. It was marked by **servanthood!** And He wanted it to be the mark of His **followers, too, so**

He began by picking 12 disciples for His inner circle to **mentor**. However, one day, as they all walked along the road to where they'd be **staying** for the night, the 12 disciples started **whispering** among themselves about who was going to be the **greatest** among them... the most well-known or **successful** or respected or **powerful**. But listen from Mark 9 what **happened**: *“After they arrived at **Capernaum** and settled in a **house**, Jesus asked His disciples, ‘What were you discussing out on the road?’ But they didn’t answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the **greatest**. He sat down, called the twelve disciples over to Him, and said, ‘Whoever wants to be **first** must take **last** place and be the **servant** of everyone else.’”* (They still didn’t get it.) **Later**, when the **same issue** reared its head again, Jesus put it to them plainly in Mark 10. He said: *“Whoever wants to be **great** must become a **servant**... “for even the **Son of Man** came not to **BE** served but to **serve others** and to give His **LIFE** as a ransom for many.”*

St. Paul wrote in Eph. 2:10 that, *“We are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good works he planned for us long ago.”* God has got all of this **amazing stuff** that He wants you and me to do! He’s planned it out! And it’s all about **servanthood**...about doing something for **others** with your life. You were created to take who God made **you** to **BE**, and then put yourself into play as a **selfless, sacrificial, servant-hearted follower**. In Jesus’ eyes, **that’s** what elevates you to **greatest** in His Kingdom—**SERVING**, rather than expecting to **BE** served!

And there were some **already on the ground floor** of the early Church’s formation who understood that **servanthood** was designed to **set aside** any “buts” that might try to **interfere** with it.

For example, let me introduce you to “**Joseph**”...not the one who helped rule Egypt **NOR** the one known as Jesus’ **step-dad**. Just “**Joe the Levite**” from **Cypress** who evidently already **knew** Jesus as His Savior and appeared at the Apostles’ **doorstep** in Jerusalem at **just the time** with a **boatload** donation of cash from selling a piece of land that not only funded **the many needy** in the **struggling** yet rapidly **growing** Church, but also intended to fund the **outreach** of the Church...even to **Gentiles** all the way up in Antioch, thus **getting off** one of the more **commonly** used “buts” **we’ve ALL heard**—*“But I don’t have either the time **OR** the money to help.”* Well, Joe did! And he used **both** to serve the needs of the fledgling Christian Church.

No longer would he be called “**Joseph**”, but now he would be nicknamed “**Barnabas** (“**The Encourager**”). Listen to **Acts 11:22-26**, *“When the church at Jerusalem heard what had happened (with many Gentiles coming to faith), they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw this evidence of God’s **blessing**, he was filled **with joy**, and he encouraged the believers to stay **true to the Lord**.”*

*Barnabas was a **good man**, full of the **Holy Spirit** and strong in **faith**. And many people were brought to the Lord! Then Barnabas went on to Tarsus to look for Saul. When he found him, he brought him back to Antioch. Both of them stayed there with the church for a full year, teaching large crowds of people. (It was at Antioch that the believers were first called “Christians”).*

I suspect from the day Joseph appeared at the Apostles’ door with that **donation in hand**, he pretty much became the patron saint of “**how to get off your “but”!**”...not only donating significant seed money for the early Church’s **funding** but also significant **TIME**—a whole **year** at **first** and then many years **thereafter** in teaching and sharing the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus throughout the Mediterranean area...**oh**, and also mentoring his young cousin **John Mark**—yes, the one who wrote the **Gospel** of Mark, and the one who St. Paul refused to take **along** with him on a missionary trip, because young Mark had **deserted** him before on a **previous** trip. But it was **Barnabas**, the **Encourager**, who **instead** took Mark under his wing (much to St. Paul’s chagrin) and **encouraged** and **mentored** him to spiritual maturity. Barnabas was not only a **GIVER** but also a **FOR**giver!

He knew that the Church was **the hope of the world**, and that the ultimate service **to** it was going to involve not only his **money**, but his **time** as well...taking what he had to **give** and pouring it into a local community of faith so that the Kingdom of God could be **expanded!** And **once again**, just like when he sold the **field**, he was **correct** in his **assessment**. It made an **impact!** In fact, it made for **another** name change.

Did you **catch** it in the text? The **impact** of his service was so **significant** that it resulted in the people of the city calling that group of believers in Antioch “**Christians**,” which means “**little Christs**”. That term had never been used of anyone before. But because of Barnabas’ **investment**, the lives of the people were becoming so **transformed** into the life that Jesus **Himself** lived that the only thing people knew to **call** them were “**little Christs**”. **CHRISTIANS!** And we people who authentically follow Jesus are **still** called that – **2,000 years later**—because of a man named **Barnabas**—the **Encourager**—who lived like Jesus asked **ALL** of us to live...not to **BE** served, but to **serve**, and to give our lives away for others.

Barnabas’ willingness to **serve**—whether through giving of his **financial** resources, his time in teaching and **mentoring**, his uplifting **relational** support and encouragement—set the early church up to **do what it did**...which was to **EXPLODE** into the world. By **100 A.D.**, there were around **7,500 followers**. By the **mid-300s**, more than **30,000,000** called themselves **followers of Christ**. And **today**, it’s **the world’s largest faith**.

So why aren't more of **US** living like this? Why aren't **MORE** of God's redeemed ones making a difference through **active serving**...inside **AND** outside the church? Why aren't we seeing that **CONNECTION** between a life of **SIGNIFICANCE** and a life that **SERVES**? To be perfectly **honest**, because too many of us still haven't gotten off our "**BUTS**" and have stuck to our **excuses**!

Think again about the two "**but**s" that Barnabas **COULD** have sat on that then would have absolutely ensured he **NEVER** would have made a difference with **HIS** life...and maybe even **the two but**s that would have kept him out of the **Bible** and thus **guaranteed** he would have always been just **another "Joe,"** instead of the beloved "*Barnabas the Encourager*"...**AND** incidently, the two but's that would have arguably removed the word "**CHRISTIAN**" from the world's **vocabulary**!

Again, the two most common "**but**s" are: "***BUT I don't have the MONEY***" and "***BUT I don't have the TIME.***" Barnabas could have sat on those two "**but**s". Nobody would have thought less of him. If he was **already** a consistent **giver**, so he could have said, "*Hey, I do my part. Why should doing more fall on **me**? Let **others** step up!*" And even if he wasn't giving much of anything, he always could have said, "***Money's tight; I can barely live off what I have. They look like they're doing all right. I need it more than they do.***" Or "***Sure, I've got a field I could sell, but why would I do that?***"

When it came to **TIME**, he could have easily said, "***Listen, don't look at me. I work full time. I really need some ME time. Maybe after I retire.***"

Or **TIMESWISE**, he always could have said, "***You're right! John Mark, my cousin, IS a quitter.***" *Why should I spend even one more **minute** trying to mentor this kid when he'll probably just cut and run **again** when the going gets **tough**?"*

The **problem** is that we don't **realize**, in the midst of all these rationalizations we **THINK** prevent us from **servicing**, that we are choking the life **out of our life**. Our "**but**s" are emptying our lives of **greatness** and **worth, meaning** and **significance**. By sitting on our metaphorical "**but**s" with these lame excuses, we really are sacrificing the **life** out of us...ironically, the life we've been **longing** for... the one we were created and **CALLED** to live at the moment of our **Baptism** when the Holy Spirit stirred the waters in the Baptismal font and whispered into our ear: "***I have called you by NAME, and YOU are MINE!***". Just like Jesus said – "**Whoever wants to be great in My kingdom must be a servant.**" Why? That's how **TRUE** greatness is measured in heaven.

And so, it's time for **ALL** of God's servants to get off our "**but**s" and **other** hesitations and excuses in order to experience the life we really **DO** want to **HAVE**

and the difference we all want to **MAKE**...a life of grateful **SERVICE** that the Holy Spirit **already** has empowered us to **LEAD** if we simply are willing to let **HIM** lead **US**. That way, no matter **what** it is you do, no matter how **SMALL** it might seem or the **difference** you **THINK** it won't **make**, God still **WILL** use it to His **GLORY** and for the good of His **CHURCH**.

My fellow **servants of Christ**: The choice to **serve** or **NOT** to serve is a **LIFE TEST** about whether you think that when **YOU** serve, God **ALSO** will show up...and that no matter **WHAT** you do, it **WILL MATTER**! It's **ALSO** a test of **FAITH & TRUST**...whether you see **SERVANTHOOD** as simply about what **YOU** do or **ULTIMATELY** what the **HOLY SPIRIT** can do **THROUGH** you.

It's time for **all** of us to get off our "**buts**" and those **other** hesitations or excuses, to instead experience the abundant life we really **DO** want to **have** and the **difference** we all want to **MAKE** in God's church....a life of grateful **SERVICE** that the Holy Spirit has empowered us to lead, **IF** we simply are willing to let **Him** Take the lead **FOR** us. That way, no matter **what** it might be that we do to the glory of **GOD**, and no matter **how** small it might **SEEM**, God **WILL** use it to His **GLORY** and for the good of His **CHURCH**.

Sooo...when it comes to the work of the kingdom, until that Last Day **comes**, there really **is** no room for anymore "**IF**'s", "**AND**'s" or especially "**BUTS**" as the Day of our Redemption now draws **CLOSER** than ever before.

In our Servant King's Name, Amen!