

“Saved to Serve”

March 18, 2018

Our Savior’s Way
Worshiping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Bill Mann

I’m going to begin this morning by reading from an ancient document. When you think you recognize the document, simply raise your hand. “When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and Nature’s God entitle them a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Do you know where these words come from? They are the opening words of the Declaration of Independence. Have you ever noticed that the word “Rights” (as in “unalienable Rights”)—the word “Rights” is capitalized. Our nation’s founders believed that our rights as Americans are very important. They also added another document, the “Bill of Rights” to the Constitution. These rights are so important that no president, judge, jury or lawyer can take our rights away. That’s the blessing of being born in America. We have rights! The challenge comes when my rights conflict with your rights (or vice versa), when your rights clash with my rights—that’s when we have a problem. This kind of disagreement—about rights—can fracture relationships. It can lead to court cases and street demonstrations—even civil war.

In our Gospel for today we have a case study in exactly this kind of conflict. Two of Jesus' disciples—James and John—approach Jesus and say, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” Jesus says, “What do you want me to do for you?” James and John answer, “Give us the right to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” At this point all the disciples believed that Jesus was ready to set up his new administration. They all wanted the plum appointments on his transition team. Two brothers, James and John, decided to get the jump on the other disciples. They wanted to secure the positions of greatest authority—one on his right and one on his left—for themselves. And in verse 41 you can read the reaction of the other 10 disciples—“When the 10 heard it they began to be indignant at James and John.” Why do you think they were indignant? First of all, they resented the fact that James and John thought of this question before any of the rest of them. Second, they all believed that each of them had as much right to these positions of power and authority as James and John. (Maybe even more)

I don't think this attitude is uncommon, is it? When I first came to Northern Virginia to start this church I wanted to put out a church newsletter. There was this wonderful lady over at the Post Office, Nancy Solomon, who used to help me do that. She explained all the rules and made sure the newsletters were delivered within the week and, if I make a mistake, she helped me correct it. It was wonderful. But then Mrs. Solomon retired and a new guy took her job. At the end of the month, I dropped off the church newsletters at the Post Office, as usual. The next day I received a phone call—“Come pick these newsletters up. We can't mail them.” There were rules and regulations and standards to be met—mailing labels, 4-digit zip code extensions. All the zip codes needed to be separated into different packages. Each package wrapped with two Post Office approved rubber bands. I cannot tell you how angry I was. I felt my rights had been totally violated. After all, I am a tax-paying citizen. I have my rights. These government employees are there to serve me. I wanted to take violent action and smack that post office employee over the

head with a package of newsletters. But I didn't do that, and so I'm still pastor of Our Savior's Way instead of leading a prison ministry.

Here's the problem-- I got it all wrong. I was living in my own self-centered little universe. You know the one I mean—where there are things you have to do and places you have to go and schedules you need to meet—and everybody else in the world is put here to serve us and our needs. Take a step back from that attitude and listen to what Jesus has to say, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. For whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The problem was I needed an attitude adjustment. So the next time I went to the post office I wasn't angry. I put a smile on my face. I welcomed Chris (I found out that was his name) to his new position. I told him I wanted to get this newsletter mailing right. I asked for his help and instruction. And over the course of time, believe it or not, we even became friends.

So, there are two things I try to remember. First, I believe the Declaration of Independence got it right about rights. It doesn't say that our rights come from the government or our status as American citizens. It says that our “unalienable rights” come from our Creator God. Which means that each person in this world is an individual valued and important to our Father in heaven. That's why he sent his Son Jesus to die for ALL of us—even the thoughtless, uncooperative person who is getting in my way and driving me to distraction. Even the jerk that cuts me off on the Toll-way. Even that person (especially that person) has a right to my love and respect.

Second, when I feel my rights are being violated I need to remember who my master is. There was a story about a woman who was getting married to a pilot in the Air Force. As newlyweds they made plans to spend the weekend together. But on Friday, her husband's squadron

called and told him he had to pack his flight bag and leave the next afternoon for an 8-day mission. His new wife was understandably upset. She said, “Don’t you get weekends like normal people?” He replied that—No, as a member of the Air Force he was on call 24-hours a day, 365 days a year. She looked up at him and said, “But honey, can’t you just explain that we had plans?” Could he tell the Air Force he had other plans?—No! Why not?—Because the Air Force owned him. They didn’t ask him to do things, they ordered him. As the saying goes, “When the Air Force asked him to jump, he asked, ‘How high?’ on the way up.” The Air Force was his master.

Jesus is our master. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says, “You are not your own. You were bought with a price.” Philippians 2:3 says, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.” Then it says, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” Jesus stripped himself of his God-hood so that he could come down to earth to be mistreated, ridiculed, whipped and crucified for us. Was any of it “right”?—No. If Jesus wanted he could have called up armies of angels to impose his rights. But instead the Son of God chose to serve us by giving us a right we don’t deserve—forgiveness and eternal life in his name. He saved us—not so we could demand our rights—but so that we could follow him in humility and use our lives in serving others.