

# *Serving One Another?*



Jesus told his disciples in Mark 9:35, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” We are called to be servants, serving one another, but it matters *who* and *how* we serve if we are to follow Jesus.

If we are working to gain wealth or the praise of others then we are serving ourselves and not God or our neighbour. But when we try to care especially for the most vulnerable and needy in society who will not repay us; children, the aged, the sick, dementia sufferers, the homeless and those we do not like, then we are loving and serving God and our neighbours.

After Jesus told his disciples that they were to be servants of all, he demonstrated his words by taking a small child in his arms and identifying himself with this child, reckoned as the least in first century Jewish society. To welcome and serve even children, valuing and respecting them, was how his followers were to behave towards others. Small children need care and love to survive, grow and mature. But we all, in one way or another, are vulnerable children needing at times to be loved and hugged by God, perhaps through a person or community who cares about us and serves us.

We serve others in various ways and situations. It may be the heroic work of caring for a sick family member over a long period, regularly praying for people, or by being pushed out of our comfort zone to protest on behalf of those without a voice who are treated unfairly, bullied or abused. This can include people, animals, plants, rivers and land. On the other hand, we may serve one another by saying sorry to people we have hurt, forgiving those who have hurt us or people we love, and thanking others.

How we serve others is important. Last month we, Sisters, had a large Blackbutt Eucalypt cut down because it was in danger of falling. During the tree's removal an irrigation pipe was severed. I bought a length of plastic pipe and two joiners to repair it. After three days I had only managed to push one joiner on to one end of the new pipe! So I decided to ask the plumber who came to service our sewage system to mend it. When I explained it was too hard for me, he did not ridicule me for being weak, but treated me with respect. As he worked he said that he was finding it hard too. He eventually warmed the pipe, asked for my help to hold one end of the pipe, and completed the repair. Afterwards I felt affirmed and valued as a person. It was a small service, but the way it was performed made a difference to me.

The church today has lost its status in Australian society because of the abuse of children by some of its leaders. As members of the same broken body of Christ, whether we have been guilty or not of abusing or bullying others, we still share in the guilt and shame of these actions, as Christ does, and need to say sorry. When we serve those suffering, we can no longer feel superior for we share something of their pain. In the sharing, their wounds and ours can begin to heal.

But there is another side to serving. If we are serving one another, then we shall also be served by one another. We follow Jesus who both served others and was served by others. At one meal, Jesus served his disciples by washing their feet (John 13:5), and at another had his own feet washed by the tears of a woman who was identified as a sinner (Luke 7:38).

When we unexpectedly become ill or realise we are older and weaker than we used to be, it can be hard to accept help, particularly from some people. We want to be independent, but have to admit that we need assistance and are grateful for it.

Sometimes when we are supposed to be served, we feel bullied or abused. Recently we have heard stories of residents in aged care facilities being roughly treated by those employed to care for them. As victims in such situations, we can respond in various ways. It might be by forgiving those who have hurt us, protesting against the injustice, retaliating with angry words or actions, retreating into silence or, (as I have noticed among my hens in the fowl yard) turning to bully others weaker than ourselves. Some of these responses are ways of serving others, but some are not.

Jesus showed respect to all people, especially women and children. By this means he challenged bullying and abuse which belittle the value of human beings, and indeed of all God's creation. Being respected and treated as the children of God, created and loved by God, we begin to value ourselves. Then we are encouraged to serve others by trying to respect, love, pray for and understand them. This way of serving applies even to our relationships with perpetrators, for whether we know it or not, we are all God's loved children.

At times we all struggle to love and be loved, to serve and be served. By loving and serving one another, we share the unique gifts we have which can benefit others and, strangely, also ourselves. As Christians, this is how we are called daily, painfully and joyfully, to follow our beloved crucified and risen Lord Jesus, the first of all, last of all, and servant of all.

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