

Unworthy Servants

So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty." (Luke 17:10 NIV)

As I fast approach retirement, much of my thoughts have been about the meaning of service. Service has been my calling and profession for over forty years. Of course, librarianship is a career deeply rooted in service. Within higher education it is typical for libraries to be associated with other academic support services.

Among the parables of Jesus there is one recorded in Luke 17:7-10 which doesn't have a parallel in the other gospels. It stands alone as a picture of service in the kingdom of God. Honestly, I cannot recall ever hearing a sermon based upon this text. The picture is one of a slave who after working in the fields and herds all day returns only to serve his master at the table. His day of labor does not end with any special privilege but only more demands for service.

Jesus makes application of the parable for his disciples with a call to humility.

So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty." (Luke 17:10 NIV)

Here we have a clue to what faithful discipleship entails. In our relationship with God we ought to do all He has commanded. By extension, we ought to also do everything expected of a disciple of Jesus in our relationship with others.

This text reminds us that being dutiful is its own reward. We should never think of our service as being something beyond the call of duty. For the Christ follower and as Christian librarians there is no "beyond." For the disciple, service in the kingdom of God is never meritorious. We cannot earn and do not deserve what is freely given us as children of God. We can only do our duty as "unworthy servants" to honor the one who provided us with such a place of privilege in the family of God.

This parable stands as a prime example of what leadership in the kingdom looks like. After all, it was our Lord who told His disciples, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35b NIV). Again, at the Last Supper, He reminded them with the following rhetorical questions: "For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27 NIV).

I must confess that too often in my service to the church and Christian higher education I have failed to model such leadership. Even in those occasions when I have done so there is no room for boasting nor any special merit. All I have is the privilege of being an unworthy servant.



—Steve Baker

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