

Text: Mark 10:35-45

Title: The Routine of Self Sacrifice

Location: Community Presbyterian Church, Celebration, FL

Preacher: Rev. Dr. William Lewis, Senior Pastor

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Earnest Gordon wrote a WWII testimony "*Through the Valley of the River Kwai*" and tells about an experience in a prisoner of war camp. The prisoners were assigned work duty on the railroad. When the day's work ended, the tools were counted and the guard declared a shovel was missing. The guard insisted someone had stolen it, so he walked up and down in front of the men ranting and raving. Screaming in broken English he demanded that the guilty party step forward and take his punishment. No one moved. The guard's rage reached new heights, All Die! He shrieked. The guard pulled back the bolt of his rifle ready to fire at the first man he saw at the end of his scope. At that moment a Christian named Argyle stepped forward, stood at attention and said calmly I did it. The guard unleashed intense violence upon the soldier beating and kicking the prisoner. Argyle stood silently as the blood streamed down his face. His silence seemed to goad the guard to excessive rage causing him to take his rifle and smash it over Argyle's head—killing him. When the tools were counted again no shovel was missing.

The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many. Lent is a time for us to contemplate Christ's sacrifice on the cross for our sins; I want to talk about His call for us to follow His model of self sacrifice.

A woman shared how she had lost her father when she was only two years old, he tragically died in a car accident at 25 leaving a wife and four children all alone with no income. But the children grew up not knowing how dire their circumstances were because people stepped in to support them, not only with the essentials, but even with Christmas presents.

Inevitably, the conversation turned into a cultural analysis wondering what happened; where once we took care of one another, but today society has denigrated to the point where we don't even speak to our neighbors.

Where did it all go wrong? Society is a reflection on the individual. Which leads us to the Self...the focus on the Self was the deciding factor in the Garden of Eden that brought sin into existence. The self is where the spiritual battle takes place either actualizing or neutralizing our Christianity...Father Not My will but Thy Will.

Christopher Lass in his book *The Culture of Narcissus* gives an insightful perspective on what happened to our society. In the Greek legend Narcissus was astonishingly beautiful, and he fell in love with his own reflection. Narcissus is the archetypal symbol of that most tragic form of Idolatry, the worship of one's own self image.

Freud first coined the word Narcissism after noticing many of his patients had an extreme preoccupation with the self. The Narcissistic personality according to the Socio Psychological fields is the characteristic

personality type of the Western World. Psychiatrists have labeled Narcissism as the leading emotional disorder today.

Narcissism differs from the strong self centered egoist in that the characteristic feature of Narcissism is an insecure sense of self, pathetically dependent upon others for affirmation. Just as Narcissus needed the reflection of the pond the narcissist needs the mirror of other people's admiration to feel good about themselves. The preoccupation with the self is a psychological defense hiding a profound insecurity.

Why is this neurosis so prevalent? The breakdown in family life has had a profound effect upon the inner security of the individual. There is an epidemic of people struggling with low self image. People are obsessed with thinking about themselves, developing themselves, finding themselves, because fundamentally they are not sure who they are.

The evidence is everywhere: the fixation with physical appearance is a way of seeking to be admired so that you feel ok about yourself.

Contemporary culture's preoccupation with sex is another avenue of seeking to affirm one's self worth. Workaholic's obsession with success is often a way of escaping from a fragile sense of self worth...I have to prove myself to others.

The book stores are filled with volumes on Getting in touch with yourself, self actualization, self image, self esteem, self assertiveness ...even Christianity has been affected the gospel according to the self-- what Jesus can do for you!

The problem is the preoccupation with the self leaves us empty and lures us into self defeating lifestyles and corrupts our relationships.

Jose Rivera was a bandit who was ransacking Mexican and Texas towns on the border. So a sheriff tracked Jose down to a bar and asked a young man do you know who Jose Rivera is? The young man said, "That's him over there," pointing to a man sitting all alone. The sheriff approached him asking, "are you Jose Rivera?" He shrugged his shoulders saying no comprende—so the sheriff asked the young man to interpret. Tell him Jose Rivera I'm here to get all the money you stole or put a bullet in your head right here right now. The young man relayed the message. Jose Rivera said tell the Sheriff make a right down the road and go one mile till you come to a concrete slab, look under there and you will find all the money I stole. Bags of money down the road one mile under the concrete slab—it's all there. The interpreter said, Jose Rivera says shoot him!

The world is misinterpreting our identity, stealing from us the beautiful intentions God has in store, selling the fallacy--happiness lies in prioritizing ourselves: Satan's original lie being retold.

John the Baptist helps us understand the Christian personality when in response to his disciple's complaint that Jesus was getting all the attention, John said He must increase and I must decrease. John knew he was here to serve Jesus. John didn't fall victim to the sin of comparison. It's healthy to look at

others and see how you can become more effective and improve yourself particularly if you compare yourself to the best and draw inspiration from them.

C.S. Lewis points out that pride is not the joy of having something, but having more than the next person. We are not proud of being rich, or clever, or good looking. We are proud to be richer, cleverer, better looking than someone else.

The difficulty with being a Christian servant is it implies that someone else is more important than you. Self denial strikes at our basic identity, because by nature we are selfish.

Phillip Yancey comments it is relatively easy to inspire people with the ethic of Christian love, (much liberal humanism is built on similar feelings). But the call to renounce the self causes a revolt...

If we have a proper understanding of ourselves...sinners saved by grace, understanding our positive attributes are endowments from God not personal achievements... then we'll be free from the preoccupation and striving after the inexhaustible quest of the self.

Relinquishing the need to jockey for self promotion like James and John did in our text and embracing our identity as a child of God will determine our psychological health, so we are freed from approval addiction. Selfishness leads to captivity... God scattered the people at the Tower of Babel whose goal was let's make a name for ourselves--without God. Ironically when God punished His people for living in rebellion to His ways, their captivity was back to Babylon.

A proper understanding of the self changes our world view enabling us to see the world through Jesus' eyes.

When I was in Chicago working on my Doctorate a colleague invited me to go down to the Navy Pier to watch a movie. As we were driving down the freeway, he asked me if I minded taking a detour. "Whatever" I was along for the ride. He pulled off to stop at a gas station opened up the trunk got some gas and picked up our conversation where we left off. Only we reversed direction back toward the seminary. Suddenly he pulled over where a woman's car was stalled. He asked her, Do you need gas? She did, he filled her tank with the gas from a portable can he had in the trunk, wished her God's blessings and then we turned around and headed back toward Navy Pier. He had the eyes of Jesus looking beyond his own world, scanning the horizon even the other side of the freeway willing to be inconvenienced, taking a chance that he might be used by the Lord to bless someone.

At funerals when I ask the family tell me about your loved one. Inevitably folks will say he always took care of his own. According to the Bible Jesus' response would be: So what! Even the heathen's do that. We are called to a greater life style, taking care of others.

Steve Hudson told me a story about when he was young and wanted a bicycle. So at Christmas his dad said, listen I have saved enough money to buy you a bicycle, but the family up the road have nothing and they need a bicycle to get food and do the essentials of life. If you want the bicycle you can have it but you ought to think about it...Steve hated the truth but he knew he needed to deny himself for the poor family up the road.

Self sacrifice is not always convenient. Nor is it always pleasant. Mark Moore was dying of cancer so I visited him at the hospice. He was glad to see me and asked if I wouldn't mind grabbing his teeth out of the glass and rinsing them off and placing them in his mouth. So I did. Then he said "Pastor would you mind putting a fresh pair of socks on my feet, they are swollen and haven't been changed for a couple of days." I'm looking down the hallway for the nurse. It took great effort to get the socks off and roll on a new pair. Then he said "pastor would you put a fresh pair of underwear on me. " I wanted to explain a pastor's visit is about spiritual encouragement —offering a scripture and prayer...and then Jesus' words ring in my ear. I came to serve and give my life...

The routine of Self Sacrifice is where dignity gets restored to those who have lost theirs, it entails vulnerability it is where the deeper elements of life are touched and shared. It is a special language between you and God.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s daughter tells the story of a woman who always complained about her mother's hands. Her hands were ugly and the daughter was embarrassed by them. The daughter never understood why she displayed them in public. The daughter even got to the point where when she was graduating from college she asked her mom not to attend her graduation ceremony because she didn't want her sorority sisters to see her mom's distorted hands. So her mom missed the special ceremony. But other members of the family came and asked "where's your mother?" The daughter replied I'm embarrassed by my mom's hands and didn't want people looking at them. One of the relatives said "you should ask your mom about her hands." Well after she got her degree she went back home and asked "whatever happened to your hands, you never told me why they look so bad?" The Mom replied, "you never asked, one day you were playing in the kitchen next to the stove pot and your dress caught on fire. I didn't have time to get water or a towel, so with my bare hands I snuffed out that fire so that you wouldn't be burned, and look how beautiful your skin is."

Jesus' hands have ugly scars that reveal the tremendous love He has toward you.

Hands that were stretched out on a cross staked through to save us from eternal death.

Hands that call us to serve others as He has served us.

These hands are also inviting us to this table to embrace our identity as His people receiving His forgiveness and inclusion into His family...