

**A Great Many (Servant Leaders) Were Added
Micah 6:6-8; Acts 11:19-26**

**Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
May 26, 2019**

Special events are influencing our worship schedule today and in the coming weeks:

Next Sunday, June 2, is the annual Pontiac Show at the Burdette Brothers, where we will host a brief service of Holy Communion at 10:00. No sermon that day! The following Sunday, June 9, I will be in Chicago for my granddaughter's graduation from high school. But that is the celebration of Pentecost on the Christian calendar. I am sorry that I will not be here then with you. So today, I'm preaching, two weeks early, a sermon inspired by Pentecost, the observance of how Christianity was established and then spread throughout the ancient world. My text is from the Book of Acts, Chapter 11, verses 19 through 26:

READ ACTS 11:19-26

One treasured heirloom from my parents is a Hallmark gift card displaying the insightful words of Albert Schweitzer:

"I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve." (Albert Schweitzer)

The child of a German pastor, Schweitzer demonstrated extraordinary proficiency on the organ before pursuing theological studies, and then medicine. He spent decades as a devoted medical missionary in Africa, work for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953.

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The kind of attitude of which Schweitzer speaks is what characterized the early Christian communities, with such appeal that the number of believers multiplied, despite the very real risks inherent in the political culture of the time. Christendom grew according to the spiritual model born of Palestine, inspired by one Jesus of Nazareth, who insisted that any leader in his movements had to be a servant first: *A Servant Leader!*

Author Robert Greenleaf was surely similarly inspired, for he produced what has been for the last half century the definitive treatise on what is now known as “best practices” for non-profit organizations, including churches. He entitled his book *Servant Leadership*.

Jesus preached continually on the subject of “servant leadership”, and could have published such a book, which under his authorship would likely have been outdone in sales over the centuries by only the Bible itself. In point of fact, countless books have been written about Jesus’ servant leadership, including four Gospels we read and study on many Sundays.

Greenleaf would perhaps admit to being at least in part inspired by the selfless service embodied uniquely in Jesus. Jesus’s incomparable brand of compassionate altruism grew by leaps and bounds with every family and village he visited on his 3-year journey toward Jerusalem. When disgruntled disciples seemed not to have gotten the message, he told them directly that if they wanted to be considered special, then they had better learn to serve others, rather than to expect to be served BY others. Then he demonstrated that message by washing their dusty, calloused feet, as contemporary Christians often reenact on Maundy Thursday. The Apostle Paul became a faithful promoter of the idea, among nascent congregations from Antioch to Rome:

“Do not be proud, but accept humble duties; do not think of yourselves as wise!”

Robert Greenleaf claims that: *“Caring for persons, the more able and the less able serving each other, is the rock upon which a good society is built—a society that is more just and more loving. The servant leader is servant first...it begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve.”*

Each one of us is MORE able in some regard, and each one of us is LESS able in some other regard. I witness that reality at virtually every event I help host at the stadiums of the University of Maryland: MORE able members of families assisting LESS able members of families, for the purpose of enjoying together a commencement or a ballgame.

Greenleaf goes on: *“The best test of a servant leader is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or at least, not be further harmed?”*

I'm thinking that Jesus passed that test: Did his disciples grow as persons? Did they become healthier, wiser, freer, more likely themselves to become servants? What was the effect they had on the least privileged in their society? Did they benefit, or at least not be further harmed?

In early Christendom, a great many (servant leaders) were added!

I'm thinking that this might be the test by which to evaluate the contribution of a certain outreach ministry established some time ago in a modest Maryland village, between the low mountains and a large bay: Have that town's disciples grown as persons? Have they become healthier, wiser, freer, more likely themselves to become servants? What has been the effect that they had on the least privileged in their society?

The Book of Acts reports, that because of the faithful work of our ancestors, “a great many (servant leaders) were added!”

According to Greenleaf, a church distinguished by servant leadership is *“a gathering of persons who have accepted a common purpose, and a common discipline to guide the pursuit of that purpose, to the end that each involved person reaches higher fulfillment as a person, through **servicing and being serviced** by the common venture, than would be achieved alone or in a less committed relationship.”*

And a great many (servant leaders) were added to their number.

An Amish farmer was asked what “community” meant to him. He relayed that whenever he and his son are finished with spring plowing, they let their horses rest at the highest point on their farm, where they can see 13 other teams of horses working the neighborhood fields. The farmer said: “I know that if I get sick or die, those 13 teams will be at work on my farm”.

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