

North East UMC/Devotions for Week of August 20, 2017

Lessons From Shenandoah: STEP DOWN

By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Sunday, August 20, 2017

Read Matthew 17: 1-13.

Peter wants to put up three shelters or tabernacles, one for Jesus, Elijah and Moses. During the Feast of Tabernacles, Jews would build shelters for themselves and live in them for seven days (Lev. 23: 42-43), remembering their journey through the wilderness.

It was at that moment, God spoke, and told the disciples that Jesus was His Son, and to “*listen to Him.*”

Jesus tells the disciples to not be afraid and then to follow Him down the mountain. It is down the mountain that we find our ministry, we find our mission, we find our purpose as we help to build the kingdom of God on earth. It is in the valley we work to fulfill the Great Commission.

And Jesus’ first action in the valley is not to share the mountaintop experience with others, but to heal an epileptic boy (Matt. 17: 14-20).

The mountaintop is where we gain our strength, where we draw close to the One who created us and calls us. But we must not only “step up” into the presence of God, drawing closer to Him and allowing Him to draw close to us; we must also “step down” from the mountaintop, into the valley, reaching out to the least, the lost, and the lame, letting them know of the love of God.

Are you taking time to “step up” the mountain and sit with Jesus? Are you finding yourself wanting to stay there or are you coming down from the mountain, into the valley, and using your life to touch the lives of others for Christ? How are you serving Him in the valley?

Monday, August 21, 2017

Read Titus 3:14 & Philippians 4:19.

Paul tells Titus, “*People must learn to do good by helping others who have urgent needs.*” We are called to serve others, to meet their needs, to “step down” from the mountain. Jesus demonstrated this, modeled this, throughout His life. He served the prostitute, tax collector, blind man, leper, adulteress, insane, and the lost. He taught us, by His example, to serve others and to meet their needs.

Why do we do this? Paul writes in Philippians, “*And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from His glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.*” Why do we serve...we serve because of all God has given us...we serve because God meets our needs...we serve because God gave His Son, Jesus Christ to the world. As a Danish proverb states, “*What you are is God’s gift to you; what you do with yourself is your gift to God.*”

John Wesley said, “*Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you can.*” Again, why do we do this? As Rick Warren writes, in The Purpose Driven Life, “*It cost Jesus his own life to purchase your salvation. The Bible reminds us, ‘God paid a great price for you. So use your body to honor God’ (I Corinthians 6:20). We don’t serve God out of guilt or fear or even duty, but out of joy, and deep gratitude for what he’s done for us. We owe him our lives. Through salvation our past has been forgiven, our present is given meaning, and our future is secured. In light of these incredible benefits Paul concluded, ‘Because of God’s great mercy...Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service’ (Romans 12:1).’*”

How are you serving God? In what ways are you meeting the needs of others...reaching out beyond yourself in service to the church, the community and the world? As Warren writes, “*If I have no love for others, no desire to serve others, I should question whether Christ is really in my life.*”

Pray about how you might serve God, showing thanks for all God has given you. Pray that God will fill your heart with love for others and open your eyes to the needs around you.

Tuesday, August 22, 2017

Read I Corinthians 12: 12-31.

The Bible is clear that each of us in the church have a role to play...each of us have been given by God gifts for that role...and every role is important. Warren writes, “*There is no small service to God; it all matters.*”

Warren goes on to write, “*There are no insignificant ministries in the church. Some are visible and some are behind the scenes, but all are valuable. Small or hidden ministries often make the biggest difference...There is no correlation between size and significance. Every ministry matters...Today thousands of local churches are dying because of Christians who are unwilling to serve. They sit on the sidelines as spectators, and the Body suffers.*”

We have so many needs at North East UMC...some that are being met and some that are not. Every ministry is vital to our church creating an opportunity for those who walk in our doors to hear and have their eyes opened to the

message of Jesus Christ...vital to our church reaching out beyond our doors to those in need.

How might you step up and serve in the church? What job might you be willing to take on? How might you work behind the scenes to help Janes UMC create an atmosphere conducive to receiving visitors and welcoming them in the name of Christ? Pray that God will show you an area that you can help out in.

Wednesday, August 23, 2017

Read John 13: 1-17 & Galatians 6:3.

Jesus taught His disciples by example, saying, *“And since I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow.”* “Step Down.”

Warren writes, *“God will never exempt you from the mundane. It’s a vital part of your character curriculum. The Bible says, ‘If you think you are too important to help someone in need, you are only fooling yourself. You are really a nobody’ (Galatians 6:3). It is in these small services that we grow like Christ. Jesus specialized in menial tasks that everyone else tried to avoid: washing feet, helping children, fixing breakfast, and serving lepers. Nothing was beneath him, because he came to serve. It wasn’t in spite of his greatness that he did these things, but because of it, and he expects us to follow his example. Small tasks often show a big heart. Your servant’s heart is revealed in little acts that others don’t think of doing...No task is beneath you when you have a servant’s heart.”*

Warren goes on to write, *“Don’t look for great tasks to do for God. Just do the not-so-great stuff...try serving in ordinary ways.”*

Again, take time tonight to pray about how you might serve another...how you might serve in the church and in the community.

Thursday, August 24, 2017

Read Mark 10:35-45 & Romans 16:18.

The disciples are arguing with each other about who is the greatest. James and John decide to ask Jesus if they can sit in places of honor next to Christ in His kingdom. Jesus explains to them that anyone who wants to be a leader, must first be a servant. Jesus states, *“Whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all. For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many.”*

Warren writes, *“Servants don’t promote or call attention to themselves...The most significant service is often the service that is unseen. In heaven God is going to openly reward some of his most obscure and unknown servants...people we have never heard of on earth, who taught emotionally disturbed children, cleaned up after incontinent elderly, nursed AIDS patients, and served in thousands of other unnoticed ways. Knowing this, don’t be discouraged when your service is unnoticed or taken for granted. Keep on serving God!”*

Paul writes, in I Corinthians 15:58, *“Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort” (The Message).* Even the smallest service is noticed by God.

We must not serve our *“own personal interests”* as Paul writes, but instead take the focus off of self and place it on others. Richard Carlson, in *An Hour to Live, An Hour To Love*, writes about the time he decided to stop playing tennis, a sport in which he was headed toward turning professional. He writes, *“When we first met, I was a top-ranked competitive college tennis player with plans to turn professional. The problem was, my heart wasn’t in it anymore...Virtually everyone I knew encouraged me to keep playing...Who cared if I was miserable? But it turned out someone did care, and that was Kris. She was the first person I met who said to me, ‘Richard, if you’re not happy, it’s time to quit being competitive and start listening to your heart. It’s time to change direction.’ A month later, I was spending time as a Big Brother for the Big Brothers of America program, phasing out of competitive tennis. It was one of the first times I had listened to my heart instead of my head. As a Big Brother, I was focusing on someone else’s needs instead of my own, so it was also one of the first times I felt the intense inner joy and satisfaction of giving.”*

Our focus need to shift from self...from being noticed...from rewards and attention...to simply serving...giving...giving because God gave us His own Son...giving because Christ gave us His own life...And in giving, we will be blessed.

Friday, August 25, 2017

Read Colossians 1:25 & Ephesians 3:7.

Paul is clear that he has been given a responsibility to serve the church, to preach the message, to reach out to others in the name of Christ. This is a responsibility given to all who claim the name of Christ, to all who are disciples. Paul goes further, because Paul is not serving Christ simply because it is his responsibility, but Paul is serving and reaching out because it is a "WONDERFUL PRIVILEGE". Paul understands the awesome opportunity and blessing we have been given by God to help God in His work in the world. Not only are we invited to "step up" on the mountaintop and sit in intimacy with our God, but we are invited to "step down" into the valley and serve alongside Him to reach a hurting world. Not only is it a privilege to be asked to help, but when we help, try to reach out and help others see Christ, we are mightily blessed. Our lives are forever changed and transformed. As the psalmist sings, "*Who are you Lord that you are mindful of me?*" What an awesome gift, a "*wonderful privilege*" to have God's love and to be able to work for Him in the world.

Take time tonight to give God thanks for the gift of His attention and the gift of being able to serve God in the world.

Saturday, August 26, 2017

Read Malachi 3:6-18 & Colossians 3:24.

The people ask, "*What's the use of serving God? What have we gained by obeying his commands or by trying to show the Lord Almighty that we are sorry for our sins.*" People ask, "Why bother with God?" as they look around at the world and see the wicked get richer, the unjust gain power, and the faithful suffer. It is a question we all ask as we notice the injustice in the world...we wonder "Why do bad things happen to good people?"

But God answers through the prophet Malachi and cries out, "*On the day when I act, they will be my own special treasure. I will spare them as a father spares an obedient and dutiful child. Then you will again see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.*" God says that there will be justice and the faithful will be rewarded.

Paul writes in Colossians 3:24, "*Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward.*"

Ecclesiastes 2:8 reads, "*You who fear the Lord, trust in him, and your reward will not be lost.*"

As Richard Fuller wrote, "*Today, let us rise and go to our work. Tomorrow, we shall rise and go to our reward.*"

We are called to serve and we are promised a great reward for our faithfulness. When it seems like our service is going unnoticed...or our work seems unimportant...or perhaps many around us who are not putting in the time and sacrifice for God are experiencing material rewards beyond our dreams...we must keep our sights on Jesus Christ and the heavenly reward God promises each of us.

Give thanks tonight for all of God's promises. Continue to pray about how you might serve God more in and with your life. "STEP DOWN" the mountain. And don't forget to invite someone to church tomorrow.