

“Difference Makers”

Matthew 23: 1-12

Rev. Ed Hoekstra

What makes the difference in your day? It is great when you are noticed and treated with respect. When people are kind to you and take your needs into consideration it is a treat. We all love to be served well at a restaurant. We all like to be served well at a store. Jackie and I were looking for an employee to receive information about a product. After repeated requests, asking for someone to help us with no response, we left the store in frustration. We were saying to ourselves that this is not how to run a business. ***The service was poor – even non-existent and they are certainly not getting our business! Isn't the customer the most important?***

Serving was vitally important to Jesus. In our scripture reading today we hear about Jesus telling us how not to live. Jesus' comments were directed at the religious leaders of the day. Jesus was saying in the first few verses in this passage that the Scribes and Pharisees were competent teachers of the law. Jesus encouraged people to follow what they say, but do not do what they do. Jesus said that you can't go wrong following their teachings on Moses, but do not follow how they act. They love to show how great they are, as they strut around in their fancy religious clothes. They load the people up with impossible demands that the leaders have no intention to carry out themselves. They go to the market place expecting high respect and honour from others. Jesus was teaching that this is not how to live. The religious leaders' service to the people is poor – even non-existent. These religious leaders are not helping the cause for God's Kingdom – in fact they are missing what is most important.

They had it all wrong. Jesus said that it works this way, ***'The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted (Matthew 23: 11, 12).'*** In other words, the greatest thing that will make a difference in the world is to serve others. Jesus overturned the values of the world in terms of what people thought was the greatest way to live. In our culture today, we are not encouraged to serve others, but to serve ourselves. The life goal for many in the west is to be rich and famous. This is to our detriment and the world's detriment. On the contrary, as followers of Christ, we are to live as servants to others.

Practice makes progress! How can we practice this to get better at serving and being hospitable to one another? In order to be a servant for Christ, we are to notice not only our friends in the congregation, but those we do not know as well. That will already make a difference, especially for those who are feeling alone. Do you notice the children in our congregation and speak kindly with them? When we follow Christ by serving others, we become stronger people. A definition of what strong people do is found in our focus quote today, ***“Strong people don't put others down... They lift them up.”*** Michael P. Watson.

Another word for serving would be hospitality. Showing biblical hospitality is not about the server, it is about the one who is being served. In His sacrificial act of giving his life by dying on the cross, and rising from the dead, Jesus made the greatest difference - he changed the world! He put himself aside for others, to save us from death and any injustice or evil that leads to death. Christ is our savior and life mentor! How have you made a difference in another's life by serving them?

Every day! *A story is told by Scott Peck, the famous psychologist and author. Peck tells about a female patient who was suffering from deep depression. One day when she was due for an appointment, she called Dr. Peck saying that her car broke down, and she would not be able to make her appointment. Dr. Peck offered to pick her up on his way to work, and if she didn't mind, he would need to stop by the hospital to do some visits and she would have to wait in the car. She agreed.*

When they arrived at the hospital, he had another suggestion. He gave her the name of two patients in the hospital and he said that each of them would enjoy a visit from her. When they met back at the car about an hour and a half later, the woman was on an emotional high. She said that the experience of visiting the patients and trying to cheer them up raised her spirits as well, and she was feeling really good. Dr. Peck responded by saying, "Now you know what to do to get you out of your sadness. Now we know how to treat your depression. The woman responded by saying, "You don't expect me to do that every day, do you?"

That is a tragedy of our lives. Doing what Jesus would do lifts us out of our doldrums into a higher quality of life. As Christians, we know that the most important thing we can do is follow the way of Jesus – and that is to serve others in love! That is what makes the difference in our lives and in the lives of those we serve. Keep serving as Christ did and with the power of the Holy Spirit, you will contribute to changing the world one day at a time. Amen.