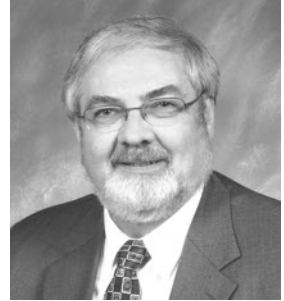


First Christian Church

(Disciples of Christ)
210 North Fifth Street
Ponca City, Oklahoma

The 20th Sunday after Pentecost
October 18, 2009

Job 38:1-7; Psalm 104:1-9, 24, 35c;
Hebrews 5:1-10; Mark 10:35-45
the Rev. Larry B Metzger, pastor



Yesterday as Kathy and I were returning from her folks, we passed a sign not too far out of Ponca City that said $\frac{3}{4}$ Ranch.

Now that has my interest. So do we have a ranch that is not quite a full ranch? Or is it a ranch that is not trying to be the best... like first.

It is not uncommon to see in any city a “First Presbyterian, a “First United Methodist,” a “First Baptist,” a “First United Church of Christ,” or a “First Christian Church.”

What we don’t see are many 2nds. In fact, in many cities we can find a third, fourth or even fifth Church but not many 2nds.

There is a 12th Presbyterian Church I have seen and even a bank by the name of Fifth Third.

There is a church in Dayton, Ohio that is called “Omega Baptist Church.” Omega is the last letter of the Greek alphabet. Another way to say it is, the last Baptist Church.

Who wants to be last? Not me. Not many of us.

Zebedee was probably nodding his head and disbelief. Here were his sons, James and John, trying to pull a fast one on Jesus. They were negotiating for some special treatment.

Now Mark’s Gospel does not paint a good picture of the disciples. They never seem to get it.

In chapter 8 Peter scolds Jesus because of Jesus’ prediction. Jesus was just telling Peter the way it was going to be. He had no illusions about what was going to happen and how.

Then in chapter 9 the disciples are in an argument about who is the greatest. They still don’t understand the concept of servanthood.

Now James and John are looking for 1st and 2nd place in the hereafter.

Several years later, in the letter to the Hebrews, new disciples are warned: “one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.”

To be servant is something one does because one is called and cannot refuse.

I believe one enters ministry, not willingly, but because one is called and cannot refuse.

I don't have to tell you how hard it is to actually find people who understand the concept of serving. In any city, any town, some of the most troubling employees are those who work for the state or feds. Why, because their jobs are fairly secure after a certain period of time.

The classic example is the Post Office. There are a good many complaints about the service one gets at most Post Offices.



Usually the line is long and one person is working the windows.

The other day one of our staff had to wait a while to get to the widow to get a registered letter. When she got the letter it was from the Post Office to remind us that the time is approaching to renew our post office box.

A registered letter, could not be placed in our post office box? This was a waste of money and time: a waste of our staff time to stand in line and waste of the Post Office employee's time. To make matters more senseless, after she received the letter and was ready to go, the employee asked, “Would you like to have a Post Office box?”

To which the reply came, “I don't understand, this registered letter from you is confirmation that we have one.”

And the reply: “I know but we are required to ask each customer.”

Other service businesses send people to lunch at lunch time. Now think about that one. Lunch time is when working people can go to the post office or the bank as just two examples.

Good service is really something hard to find. And when we do, we really, really appreciate it.

Let me tell you about two businesses I read about the other day. They are both places that serve food.

The first restaurant is a big restaurant franchise with a rock-and-roll theme and memorabilia known as the Hard Rock Café. It started in 1971

as an American diner in the heart of London as anti culture and then became an icon, now part of our culture and has become corporate world with its eye on the bottom line – profit.

But the new owners of the “Hard Rock Café” brand, the Seminole Native Americans of Florida, have chosen for their new motto “Love All/Serve All.” And they are now opening up Hard Rock Hotels around the world with the same motto. “Love All/Serve All” is now the official motto or brand of the global restaurant and hotel chain.

The second restaurant is in the small community of Cannon Beach, Oregon. A preacher went out for his caffeine fix when he stumbled on this little local coffee shop.

When he reached for the door he discovered it would not open. He pulled on the door several times to see if it was just stuck. But it was locked.



Then he saw a hand-written sign inserted into the screen door: “Out to Lunch. Be back at 1:30.” He could not believe it was closed for lunch, so he walked to the front window and peeked in. The lights were on, but no one was inside. Then he saw another handmade notice: “Store for sale. Great business location and opportunity.”

Here was a café closed for lunch. The proprietor was more interested in feeding himself than promoting his business and taking care of customers. You see, the café forgot what its business was.

The local café has it wrong and the Hard Rock has it right - Love All/Serve All.

I read where 75% of churches are closing because they are declining or dying. They all want to be number 1. They want to have full buildings like they use to have.

Is it any wonder churches are declining when they have forgotten who they serve or how to serve? The community of Christ is a body that has been broken. The task of disciples, it seems to me, is to re-member, put back together, the members of the body so that it might be whole once again.

To do that, we must follow the lead, the example, and the teachings of Jesus.

Instead of positioning ourselves to be number 1, perhaps we should be striving to be last; to be the Omega Church.

Actually I think we do a pretty good job of being last. Listen how it might sound.

Last to leave people without hope.

Last to leave a sick or dying person alone.

Last to ignore a battered child, or wife, or husband.

Last to write off children whose parents, schools, or neighbors have written them off.

Last to prefer lies to truth.

Last to ignore the homeless.

Last to turn our backs on the sounds of hungry bellies.

Last to condone cruelty of any kind, to any living thing.

I wonder how it would be to have new members pledge to follow Jesus and work hard to be last.

James and John were like the little café. They thought they were in this thing for personal gain and advancement.

This week, as an act of understanding servanthood and being last, try some of these things.

1) Purposively let others get in line before you.

2) Try to be the last in line. And pray for those who seem most hurried and stressed because they're not first in line.

3) If someone in back of you at the check-out line has less items than you do, or even if they don't but seem in a hurry, let them go in front of you.

4) Let other cars "in" when they need an assist.

5) Measure your success at sporting events not by how many points you can score, but how many assists you can generate. (this list is suggested by Len Sweet, Operation Omega)

Jesus was very clear, if you want to be first, you must be last and servant of all. As hard as it may seem to be to follow his teachings, once we adopt them as a way of life being last is like a taste of paradise where lion and lamb lay side by side.

