

Year B Pentecost 22 Served to serve 20/10/24

Paul loved God and hated Jesus?

Paul, or Saul, as he was known was standing by at the stoning of Stephen the first Christian Martyr.

Paul held the coats of those stoning Stephen so they could throw the stones that bit harder.

Paul became a fear man a lover of God and a hater of Christians, a persecutor of Christians, a killer of Christians.

He loved God because the Old Testament, of which he was a scholar, was simple: obey, work hard, do the right sacrifices, and you will get to heaven. For most people this makes perfect sense.

For Paul it made perfect sense.

He served God with all his might – to the letter – to the point of persecuting Christians.

How could he love God and hate Christians.

First and foremost, Jesus claimed to be God – Jesus said: *I am the way and the truth and the life – no one comes to the father but by me.*

Secondly, Jesus forgave people's sins – this was outrageous according to Paul and others. Only God forgives sins.

And what's more Jesus forgave people sins freely.

Jesus offered underserved love.

This is ridiculous – love should be deserved according to Paul.

Lastly, the nail in the coffin, our text today Jesus said, *the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'*

God serves us – God dies for us!!

Ridiculous! So, Paul loved God all the more and hated Jesus all the more.

And began a persecution so violent that whole communities would go into hiding. In the book of Acts: "... Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison." He said, "I persecuted the followers of [Jesus] Way to their death,..." Acts 22:4

This is someone who loved God and hated Jesus – a good Jew you could say.

You know the history.

All of a sudden Paul's life was turned upside down by meeting the risen Jesus Christ in the flesh.

Paul was going from Jerusalem to Damascus – to arrest Christians and execute them - when a bright light blinded him and a voice came to him:

"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Paul answered, "Who are You?" And the voice said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."

For three days Paul was blind – In his blindness he was made to stop and reset his life.

He had spent his entire life trying to be accepted by God by serving God, by killing lambs, and by obeying rules.

Now he is hearing from Jesus that the only way to heaven is through Jesus, believing in Jesus, receiving faith from Jesus, being forgiven and made right by Jesus the Lamb of God.

In other words, he was faced with being wrong about God. He now could see in his blindness that Jesus is the way the truth and life – he could see that he had to allow Jesus to serve him.

What he hated most – becomes a new reality for him – God/Jesus serves him.

Paul regained his sight and became a believer of Jesus Christ. From then on he was one the most powerful preachers and teachers of the Christian faith that ever was.

Paul's words make up most of our New Testament. Not long after this "Damascus Road" experience, as it is now called, Paul preached in the Areopagus, in Athens.

He picked his right time – you had to know what you're talking about in the Areopagus.

He found an altar that was dedicated to 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' He used this unknown God to make a very profound statement.

"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; ..

Did you hear that – there is proof of Paul's conversion: *God is not served by human hands, He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; ..*

This is the same as what Jesus said: *Jesus said, the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'*

We have a God who serves us freely – in order to save us. We do nothing – he does all – that is what amazing grace means - We do nothing – he does all.

We do nothing – more on that in a minute.

We do not have a God who can be served by human hands – Paul's sermon, Paul's discovery.

We have a God who serves us – Luther Called this Gottesdienst – God serves us – this was the word adopted for worship.

We have lost this word in English - because we are lazy.

Gottesdienst – can be perfectly translated – a sign out the front here: God serves us here – 9.00am every Sunday.

But in our laziness, we have lost the God who serves us by adopting the Worship.

Worship is an old English word meaning “worth-ship”. It means this is the place where we come to serve God and show him what we think he is worth by what we do and what we put on the plate.

This is not the serving God Paul discovered.

You see if you are the self-supporting type. The one who says no to an offer of help – “thanks but no thanks” – “I’ll be right”. If you’re that person – The gospel doesn’t come easy.

You’re a doer, you are a Saul.

I want to serve God – I don’t like this hand-out from Jesus.

Paul’s whole identity revolved around serving God – with every ounce of effort, with all his strength, outdoing all his mates.

He boasted how good he was at serving God.

Then Jesus comes and says, I serve you.

What did he think?

What’s the point of trying.

What is the point of all my work and all those meetings?

Why bother studying God’s word?

It’s like the race of life - you train and train to be a long distance runner – and then you discover the last race is a hop, step, jump, not running – what’s the point.

I can see how the good news was actually bad news to Paul and anyone else who likes to be self-sufficient.

But what if you are the one who is able to look inside honestly and see a weak and helpless person – a person lost in sin.

What if you tried to be right with God and failed over and over.

Then the God who serves – is a good God – is a God you need – is a God you want to be with.

That God is the kind of God who cannot be served, but loves to serve.

On the front window of God’s office there is a sign - it doesn’t say "help-wanted" – it says, "help available".

"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

We know the wages of Sin are death - What we need most is the ultimate servant – we need someone who will die in our place. This is the ultimate service.

We are in no position to serve God/Jesus

We are in no position to impress him.

We are rebels at best.

God is not our loved and honoured and trusted and treasured king.

We do not love him with all our heart and mind and strength.

We are trapped in sin – destined for death.

Our greatest need is not health, is not wealth, is not a marriage repair, is not a good job, is not obedient kids.

Our greatest need is someone to serve us and die in our place and ransom us from the penalty sin, so that we escape God's judgment and can live right with him forever.

That's why Jesus says, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many."

The question is, do we believe this - will we receive God's service to us as the most precious gift in the world?

Believing. Receiving. Not serving.

That's the person who is right with God.

Our problem is that we are from German Lutheran stock – we are wired to work, we are wired to serve God.

But God says we don't serve – he the sever.

What do we do – with a working hands.

Never forget we are called to give thanks.

In fact, the mystery of God is so deep here.

He invites us to be his ambassadors.

He invites us to be Jesus to others.

He invites us to serve others with him.

He invites himself to enter our bodies and lives.

1 Corinthians 3:9: *For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.*

We are his hands and feet – eyes and ears – his mouth.

On Friday the kindly kids got this – do we get it.

Jesus is servant of all – we are called to serve with him.

What a privilege – to be a part of God's blessing to the world.

The yoke of faith and obedience are easy and light because as Jesus puts it on us he carries it. *"Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand" Isa 41.*

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask that the Holy Spirit equips us so that we can work in thanks, in love, alongside you serving our neighbour. Amen.