

SERMON NOTES
Mark 10:32-45
"Making a Difference by Serving"

Intro:

It started with tragedy on a biting cold February morning. I was driving behind the Milford Corners bus as I did most snowy mornings on my way to school. The bus veered and stopped short at the hotel, which it had no business doing, and I was annoyed as I had to come to an unexpected stop. The boy lurched out of the bus, reeled, stumbled, and collapsed on the snow bank at the curb. The bus driver and I reached him at the same moment. The boy's thin, hollow face was white even against the snow.

"He's dead," the driver whispered.

It didn't register for a minute. I glanced quickly at the scared young faces staring down at us from the school bus. *"A doctor! Quick! I'll phone from the hotel . . ."*

"No use, I tell you, he's dead." The driver looked down at the boy's still form. *"He never even said he felt bad,"* he muttered. *"Just tapped me on the shoulder and said, real quiet, 'I'm sorry. I have to get off at the hotel.' That's all. Polite and apologizing like."*

At school the giggling, shuffling morning noise quieted as news went down the halls. I passed a huddle of girls. *"Who was it? Who dropped dead on the way to school?"* I heard one of them half-whisper.

"Don't know his name. Some kid from Milford Corners," was the reply.

It was like that in the faculty room and the principal's office. *"I'd appreciate your going out to tell the parents,"* the principal told me. *"They haven't a phone, and anyway, somebody from the school should go there in person. I'll cover your classes."*

"Why me?" I asked. *"Wouldn't it be better if you did it?"*

"I didn't know the boy," the principal admitted levelly. *"And in last year's sophomore personalities column I noted that you were listed as his favorite teacher."*

I drove through the snow and cold down the bad canyon road to the Evans' place and thought about the boy, Cliff Evans. *His favorite teacher! I thought.* He hasn't spoken two words to me in two years! I could see him in my mind's eye all right, sitting back there in the last seat in my afternoon literature class. He came in the room by himself and left by himself. *"Cliff Evans,"* I muttered to myself, *"a boy who never talked."* I thought a minute. *"A boy who never smiled. I never saw him smile once."*

The big ranch kitchen was clean and warm. I blurted out my news somehow. Mrs. Evans reached blindly toward a chair. *"He never said anything about bein' ailing."*

His stepfather snorted. *"He ain't said nothin' about anything since I moved in here."*

Mrs. Evans pushed a pan to the back of the stove and began to untie her apron. *"Now hold on,"* her husband snapped. *"I got to have breakfast before I go to town. Nothin' we can do now, anyway. If Cliff hadn't been so dumb, he'd have told us he didn't feel good."*

After school I sat in the office and stared blankly at the records spread out before me. I was to read the file and write the obituary for the school paper. The almost bare sheets mocked the effort. Cliff Evans, white, never legally adopted by stepfather, five young half-brothers and sisters. These meager strands of information and the list of "D" grades were all the records had to offer.

Cliff Evans had silently come in the school door in the mornings and gone out the school door in the evenings, and that was all. He had never belonged to a club. He had never played on a team. He had never held an office. As far as I could tell, he had never done one happy, noisy kid thing. He had never been anybody at all.

I could guess how many times he had been chosen last to play sides in a game, how many whispered child conversations had excluded him, how many times he hadn't been asked. I could see and hear the faces that said over and over, *"You're nothing, Cliff Evans."*

A child is a believing creature. Cliff undoubtedly believed them. Suddenly it seemed clear to me: When finally there was nothing left at all for Cliff Evans, he collapsed on a snow bank and went away. The doctor might list "heart failure" as the cause of death, but that wouldn't change my mind.

I've never forgotten Cliff Evans nor that resolve. He has been my challenge year after year, class after class. I look for veiled eyes or bodies scrounged into a seat in an alien world. *"Look, kids,"* I say silently. *"I may not do anything else for you this year, but not one of you is going to come out of here as a nobody. I'll work or fight to the bitter end doing battle with society and the school board, but I won't have one of you coming out of here thinking himself a zero."* (Jean Mizer – "A Cipher in the Snow" – true story)

- **Max Lucado calls this *the Amazon River out of which a thousand fears flow: Do we matter? We fear we don't. We fear nothingness, insignificance.***
- **We fear being a cipher in the snow.**
- **In Henan province in China there is an orphanage for deaf and mute orphans**

- Every message tells them: *You don't matter*
- Max Lucado's children's book *"You Are Special"* was translated into Mandarin and made available to these orphans
- *The book tells the story of Punchinello – a wooden person in a village of wooden people*
- The villagers had a practice of sticking stars on the achievers and dots on the strugglers
- *Punchinello's wooden body was plastered with dots*
- Then he met Eli, his maker, who affirmed his worth: *"I made you, and I don't make mistakes."*
- When Punchinello heard these words, his dots began to fall off

- Missionary John Bentley describes what happened when these forgotten and abandoned orphans began reading this story for the first time:
- *"At a certain point, everyone started crying. These children had been abandoned and considered valueless by their natural parents because they were born "broken."*
- *"When the idea came through in the reading that they are special simply because they were made by a loving Creator – everyone started crying – including their teachers."*

- The world is filled with Cliff Evans' – who have no one to tell them the truth: *You matter to God. God made you – and God loves you – and God desires a personal relationship with you – no matter what you have done or what you have suffered or what kind of mess your life is in*

- **The first step in finding significance is to believe the Good News that you matter to God – that God loves you**
- The next step to Finding significance is: ***making a difference by serving others – helping them to know how much God loves them***
- ***But first we look at some other ways that people search for significance***

I. **SEARCHING FOR SIGNIFICANCE THROUGH POSITION, POWER AND CONTROL (10:35-37)**

Mark 10:35-37 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came over and spoke to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do us a favor."

³⁶**"What is it?"** he asked.

³⁷"In your glorious Kingdom, we want to sit in places of honor next to you," they said, "one at your right and the other at your left."

- *Nobody wants to be a Nobody – Everybody wants to be Somebody*
- *And if we can rise higher than Somebody else on the corporate ladder // or if we get higher grades or excel in sports or music better than others // of if our children excel better than others in academics or sports or music // or if we are more popular or desirable than others with the boys or the girls – if the right people think I’m cool and accept me into their inner circle // or if we make more money or live in a nicer home or drive a nicer car – then that will prove that I must be a Somebody*
- *Sometimes those worldly values get imported into the church*
- *How can I know that I matter in the church? How can I be recognized as a Somebody in the family of God?*
- *By rising to a position of leadership authority // by making sure that my hard work in the church gets noticed and appreciated // by making sure that my voice is heard in important decisions // by making sure that my faithful service is rewarded with appropriate power and control // by making sure that I network and gain favor with people of influence*
- *Pastors are not immune to these worldly values*
- *What are the criteria that determine a pastor’s worth?*
- *The more people who hear a pastor preach – and the more money they give – must prove that pastor must be a Somebody*
- *John Stott: “Even the church is full of Jameses and Johns, go-getters and status-seekers, hungry for honor and prestige, measuring life by achievements, and everlastingly dreaming of success.”*
- *In one way or another – many of us spend much of our lives reaching for the top – seeking higher honors // higher positions // higher salaries // higher awards // higher recognition // greater influence // greater successes*
- *For some it’s the love of money – or prestige– for others the lure of power and control – but for all: **the need for significance***
- *Much of our behavior – including much of our sinful and immoral behavior – is driven by the fear of nothingness – the fear of insignificance – the fear of being forgotten and unnoticed– the fear of becoming a cipher in the snow*

II. **TAKING UP THE CROSS AND BEING A LEADER IN GOD’S KINGDOM (10:32-34, 38-40)**

- The request of James and John is all the more remarkable in light of the context:
- *Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and to the Cross*

Mark 10:32-34 ³²They were now on the way to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. The disciples were filled with dread and the people following behind were overwhelmed with fear. Taking the twelve disciples aside, Jesus once more began to describe everything that was about to happen to him in Jerusalem.

³³**“When we get to Jerusalem,”** he told them, **“the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die and hand him over to the Romans. ³⁴They will mock him, spit on him, beat him with their whips, and kill him, but after three days he will rise again.”**

- *OK – Sure – Whatever – and now, Master, we want you to do for us whatever we ask – We want to sit on the thrones next to yours in Your Kingdom!*
- To say the disciples were slow to understand would be a huge understatement
- *So Jesus replied:*

Mark 10:38-40 But Jesus answered, **“You don’t know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of sorrow I am about to drink? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism of suffering I must be baptized with?”**

³⁹“Oh yes,” they said, “we are able!”

And Jesus said, **“You will indeed drink from my cup and be baptized with my baptism, ⁴⁰but I have no right to say who will sit on the thrones next to mine. God has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen.”**

- *The disciples envisioned an earthly kingdom like that of David’s – with themselves as the elite of the King’s inner circle– exercising authority over others in splendor and glory*
- *Either Jesus’ words just whistled right over their heads – or maybe they thought his suffering in Jerusalem would be just a temporary setback before His kingdom was established in power and glory*
- *They did not yet understand that suffering always precedes glory in God’s Kingdom– the Cross comes before the Resurrection and Reign*
- *Jesus asks them whether they think they can drink the cup that he drinks and be baptized with the baptism with which he is baptized*
- *The cup is a metaphor for sharing someone’s fate – in this case – suffering the wrath of God against human sin and rebellion*

- And baptism is a metaphor for being plunged into calamity
- *He will not be sprinkled with a bit of suffering – he will be submerged in it*
- So Jesus is asking James and John if they are willing to share His suffering as the condition for sharing His glory and reign
- James and John respond glibly with an ignorant cockiness: ***We are able***
- *And indeed Jesus did prophesy their suffering and martyrdom – though the disciples were clueless then what that would mean*
- **So you want to be a Christian leader?**
- Here is the basic requirement:

Mark 8:34-35 ³⁴Then he called his disciples and the crowds to come over and listen. **“If any of you wants to be my follower,”** he told them, **“you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me.”** ³⁵**If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will find true life.**

- **Put aside your selfish ambition and selfish pursuits – take up your cross and die to self-will – and give up your life for the cause of Christ – and then you will find true life and lasting significance**
- Or – live for yourself and your own self-centered pursuits – and end up wasting your life
- *The choice is yours*
- There’s nothing wrong with desiring to be a Christian leader – as long as you understand that the path to spiritual leadership is the Way of the Cross and Self-Sacrificing service to others

III. FINDING SIGNIFICANCE AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE BY SERVING (10:41-45)

Mark 10:41-45 ⁴¹When the ten other disciples discovered what James and John had asked, they were indignant. ⁴²So Jesus called them together and said, **“You know that in this world kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people beneath them.”** ⁴³**But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant,** ⁴⁴**and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all.** ⁴⁵**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.”**

- All humans have some measure of a will to power in the sense of desire to control one's own life and environment as well as to control others
- *Power is obtained or held or exercised in two basic ways: by force or by persuasion* – that is, people follow the one holding power either involuntarily (by force) or voluntarily (by persuasion)
- **Much of worldly power is coercive in nature**
- *Coercive power produces resentment and resistance, doesn't it?*
- *The early church understood the power of serving others to persuade people of the truth of the Gospel and to influence the beliefs and values of an entire society*
- Listen to this description of the early church written in 125 AD:
- *“They walk in all humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them. They love one another. They despise not the widow, and grieve not the orphan. Whoever has distributes liberally to whoever has not.*
- *“If they see a stranger, they bring him under their roof, and rejoice over him as if he were their own brother: for they call themselves brothers, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit of God.*
- *“When one of their poor passes away from the world, and any of them see him, then he provides for his burial according to his ability; and if they hear that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs.*
- *“And if there is among them a man that is poor and needy, and they have not an abundance of necessities, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food.”*
- Where did they learn the influencing power of serving?

Luke 22:26-27 ²⁶But among you, the one who serves you best will be your leader. ²⁷Out in the world the master sits at the table and is served by his servants. But not here! For I am your servant.”

- **Do you want to be a person of influence // a leader // a difference-maker ? – then devote your life to serving others in love**
- *That's how Jesus lived his life – not by trying to control others – but rather by serving others*
- **Growing in Christ-likeness cannot be separated from growing in servanthood**

- *How do you grow into spiritual maturity and Christ-likeness?*
- Not just by attending worship services and Bible studies
- *But by serving others*
- ***For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many***

- *A Christ-like church will be a Servant church devoted to serving one another in the body of Christ and devoted to serving the hurting and needy and vulnerable and forgotten and unwanted outside the body of Christ*

- **The more we serve – the more we reflect the likeness of Christ**
- ***The more we serve – the more attractive we make the Gospel to unbelievers***
- ***The more we serve – the greater will be our influence on our surrounding culture and community***

- **If we want to be a great church – then we will be a servant church**
- **If we want our church to be a moral and spiritual leader in our community – then we will serve**
- ***If we want to make the Gospel attractive and credible to unbelievers – then we will serve***
- ***If we want to earn the right to speak out and be heard on the moral and social issues of our day – then we will serve***
- ***If we want to become a spiritually dynamic body making a significant impact in vulnerable families in our community – then we will serve***

- **And if you want to be a Christian leader – making a difference in the lives of others – then you will serve others in love**

- **Starting in your family**
- ***The way of this world is to lead by taking charge – by giving orders – by getting others to work for your goals – by getting others to do what you want***
- **The Way of Christ is to lead by serving – to lead by sacrificing – to lead by loving – to lead by helping others to grow and to be successful – to lead by helping others to feel wanted and significant and valued**

- **Since the man is the head of the household – that means a Christian husband and father will be the lead servant in the family – *the one who takes the lead in serving and sacrificing and loving and meeting the needs of others and helping others reach their potential***

- *Servant leaders are somewhat of a rare breed*
- *Some men are take-charge kind of leaders – but are lacking in servant attitudes and actions*
- *Other men are certainly not domineering – but neither are they leaders – they are passive men who turn the headship of the family over to their wives*
- *A Christian man is called to be both a leader and a servant for his family*

- *Servant leadership and servant ministry begin in the family – but don't end there*
- *Our children need to see us serving others as well – And our children and youth need to be serving others too so that their lives will be full*
- ***We become Somebodies by helping others become a Somebody***

- *Thursday night Beth and I went to the Christian Friendliness Banquet with some other Cornerstone folks*
- *Many of the teens there were the epitome of vulnerable and could have ended up like Cliff Evans – a cipher in the snow*
- *Many were fatherless and had mothers who were drug addicts and emotionally unavailable*
- *They had no one to give them hope and a future – no one to tell them that their lives mattered and had value*
- *Until – some staff and volunteers at Christian Friendliness made a difference in their lives by giving of themselves to share God's love*
- *When you pour your life into a vulnerable or forgotten or fatherless or abused kid – your own life takes on new significance by giving others hope*

- *There is a man in our church who goes to Annie Wittenmeyer nearly every Sunday to pick up a vulnerable boy – a boy who is at-risk for becoming a cipher in the snow – a boy without a father or mother to love him and give him hope and a sense of worth – and this man brings this boy to Sunday School and church and then takes him out to lunch and spends some time with him*
- ***This boy has recently accepted Christ as his Savior***
- *This is the kind of Christ-like servanthood that can make a significant impact in a vulnerable child's life – as well as giving lasting significance to the man's life*

- *One of the most effective ways of making a difference in another's life is by mentoring*

- *You don't need to be a psychologist or trained counselor or seminary graduate to be a mentor*
- **You need to be a growing, caring Christian who has gained some wisdom from studying the Bible and living the Christian life for a few years**
- *If you have been a Christian for 10+ years and are not ready to mentor someone else – then you need mentoring because you are not growing in maturity*
- You can make a difference by mentoring a young mother or father
- *You can make a difference by providing marriage mentoring for another couple*
- You can make a difference by becoming a lunch buddy for an elementary student or a Big Brother or Sister or mentor for a vulnerable teen
- *You can make a difference by taking a fatherless boy to a ball game*
- *You can make a difference by becoming an AWANA or No Limits leader or a home group leader or helping Jan with her Lot 13 ministry*
- You can make a difference by joining the IPT and interceding for people going through difficult struggles
- *You can make a difference by doing practical acts of service for an elderly or disabled neighbor or a single parent*
- **You can make a difference by befriending the lonely and friendless**
- **Positive benefits of friendship: *An increased sense of belonging and purpose // greater happiness // stress reduction // improved feelings of self-worth // decreased risk of serious mental illness // help in weathering traumas and crises // empowerment to change unhealthy lifestyle habits***
- **Martin Luther King Jr. said that everybody can be great because anybody can serve: *You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You don't have to know Plato and Aristotle. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul energized by love.***
- **The primary qualification? A heart aligned with Christ's heart**

IV. JESUS THE SERVANT AND RANSOM (10:45)

Mark 10:45 ⁴⁵ **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

- *Jesus was not a Master who occasionally served others – rather Jesus was – and is – a servant by nature*
- The pre-eminent title given to the Messiah by Yahweh in the book of Isaiah was: *My Servant*
- *This is how Paul describes the Incarnation of Christ:*

Philippians 2:5 - 7 (NIV) ⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant

- *He is still a Servant – Lord of lords, yes – but still a servant*
- Not in the sense that He exists to do your bidding and do for you whatever you want
- *But in the sense, that as the Servant of the Lord doing the Father's will – He is the One who can best fulfill our deepest longings and give us true life*
- **Jesus the Servant of the Lord can meet our deepest needs far better than any boyfriend – or husband – or baby – or job – or home – or sport – or hobby**
- *Let Jesus love you – let Jesus fill you with His love and His life and His peace and His joy*
- **Let Jesus give your life a significance and purpose beyond that of anything this world can offer**
- And as the Servant of the Lord – Jesus not only sets the example of what it means to serve others with self-sacrificing love – *but Jesus also empowers that service by His Spirit within us*
- *Jesus carried out his ministry of serving others and healing others and setting captives free and giving hope and new life to the forgotten and vulnerable of his day – in the power of the Holy Spirit*
- **That same Holy Spirit lives in His followers today – to align our hearts with Christ's heart – to enable us to be the body of Christ – the hands and feet of Christ in this world - to empower us to serve others with self-sacrificing love**
- *Jesus is not only The Servant – He is The Ransom*
- *“I have come not to be served, but to serve – and to give my life as a ransom for many”*
- The Greek word means the amount paid to free a slave or prisoner, to redeem a pledge, or to reclaim something pawned.

- *The concept of ransom has to do with the idea of the cost of freedom, and exchanging one thing as a substitute for another*
- *What does it mean that Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many?*
- *Jesus sacrificed his life on the Cross in exchange for your soul – in exchange for your freedom from slavery to sin*
- *Here's the exchange that Jesus transacted on the Cross: I will take your sin and guilt and condemnation upon myself – and in exchange I will give you my freedom and righteousness*

- *How about you?*
- *Have you accepted this exchange by faith?*
- *Are you living out the reality of this exchange?*
- *Are you experiencing the reality of the liberty that Jesus purchased with his blood?*
- *Are you telling yourself the truth each day that you matter to God, that your life has value and significance and purpose – because Jesus exchanged his life for yours?*
- *And are you sharing that Good News with others who may feel worthless // forgotten // unwanted // without hope?*

Prayer

“The Old Rugged Cross”