

## BREAKING THE BARRIERS

Sterling UMC  
September 26, 2010  
Matthew 20:20-28

In July of last year I got a phone call while I was on vacation. My cell phone rang. When I looked at the number, the name that came up over caller ID was young Jin Cho. Now for those of you who do not know, young Jin Cho is our district superintendent. As you can imagine when the district superintendent calls out of the clear blue it can be more than a little bit unnerving, and when that call comes in the middle of your vacation. It's even more so.

Now although I was tempted just to let it ring, I used my better judgment and I answered the call. As we began the conversation, he explained to me the reason for his call. He said he had an opportunity he wanted to consider, he wanted me to serve as the chair of the all things new capital campaign committee for the Arlington district. He told me this would involve leading a committee of people to solicit donations to the all things new capital campaign.

I was at the same time flattered that he would consider me for such position and scared to death. This certainly would not have been what I would've chosen for a way to serve the district. This position would require me to go visit with people I did not know and who did not know me, members of other churches, to sit down in their living room and ask them to donate up to \$50,000 to the campaign.

I didn't want to do it. I could've come up with 1000 reasons why I should not be the one to do it. I don't have time. I'm too busy. That's not an area where I'm strong. I'm really uncomfortable asking people for money like that. But when the district superintendent calls, you can't very well say no. So I had to get out of the boat and serve the district and the church by doing something very uncomfortable.

Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation? You're called upon to do something uncomfortable. Something you don't feel it you have time to do. Something that you're not equipped to handle.

Well, my friends, whether we like it or not God is constantly calling us. Ephesians 2:20 says, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do". You were made to make a contribution, not just to consume. God made you to make a difference. We're all meant to give something back. We're all meant to make a contribution. The Bible says we're created to serve, we're saved to serve, we're gifted to serve. As Christians our purpose in life is to serve God by serving others. You weren't put here just to take up space, consume and get a

free ride through life. You were put here to serve God and the way you serve God is by serving other people.

Now the Bible has a word for this, it's called "ministry". Now this is a word that is often misunderstood. When I say the word "minister" most people think of priest, pastor. They think of somebody who wears those funny collars, or a robe, and talks like [*close to microphone, in a deep voice, drawing out the word*] "GOD", and you know, that kind of stuff! But the Bible says every believer is a minister. Now, not every believer is a pastor, but every believer is a minister. Ministry simply means using my knowledge, skill, abilities and desires to help somebody else in the name of God. Any time you use your talents, your abilities, your background, your experiences to help somebody else, you know what that's called? Ministering.

In the Bible the word "service" and "ministry" are the same word. And in the Bible "servant" and "minister" are the same word. So all of us are called to ministry. So you say "I'm not called to ministry". Oh yes you are! If you are called to salvation, you are called to serve.

Now the good news is that God not only created us for service, He gave us a model. He came to earth Himself and said "This is how you do it. I want you to watch Me". He came to earth in the form of a man, Jesus Christ, and He said, "This is what I want you to do with your life". You were created to be like Christ, and what did Christ do while He was here on earth? He served. Our Scripture lesson this morning speaks to this fact. Matthew 20:28, "*Jesus said, 'Your attitude must be like My own, for I did not come to be served, but to serve'.*"

You know a lot of people spend so much of their time searching for self-esteem, for self-worth, and significance. They want to feel good about themselves. But they're looking in all the wrong places! You don't get your self-worth from success, because there's always somebody else who does a better job. You don't get your self-esteem from status. You don't get your self-esteem from your salary. The Bible says you get your self-esteem from service. Jesus said to give your life away in order to find it.

So, what does it take to be used by God and to learn to serve like Jesus? Serving like Jesus means being available. You must be willing to get out of the boat and say "OK, I'm out of my comfort zone God, what do You want me to do?" There are hurting people all around us, and the wounded will not wait. We've got to help them now. And what is it that keeps us from being available? Let me give three common barriers.

Number one: self-centeredness. Whenever you see a need right in front of you, guess what? God is giving you the opportunity to practice serving. You see the number one enemy of compassion is busyness. We just get too busy! And because I'm so busy, I don't have time to serve. I've got my agenda, my plans, my dreams, my goals, my ambitions.

If you really have a servant heart, like Jesus Christ, you don't mind being interrupted because your agenda is God's agenda, and you get up in the morning and you say "OK, God, you want to bring somebody in my life today? Bring them in! Bring them on!" Did you know that almost every miracle and almost every act of ministry Jesus did, He did when He was interrupted. We have this self-centeredness that gets in the way and gets to be a barrier.

A second barrier to being used by God...is perfectionism. Perfectionism. You know, wanting every thing to be perfect. You ever heard someone say, "When it's all just right, when things settle down, when I have more time, then I'll serve." Ecclesiastes 11:4 says: "If you wait for perfect conditions, you'll never get anything done." Would anybody like to give a testimony on that verse? Real servants, Christ-like servants, do the best they can with what they have for Jesus Christ today. They don't wait.

If God only used perfect people, what would get done in this world? Nothing, zip, zero! We all have weaknesses. We all have faults. We all have failures. We all have handicaps. But guess what? God uses us all. Why? Because God doesn't use perfect people because there aren't any. God uses normal people. So God says, "Don't wait for perfect conditions." There is no such thing.

Number three: materialism. Materialism is the third barrier that keeps us from being available to serve. Jesus said, *"No servant can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and money."* (Lk. 16:13). Now would you circle the word "cannot"? He didn't say, "You should not serve both God and money." He said, "You cannot serve both God and money." You've got to decide whether you want to be rich or you want to be blessed. Really! I'm telling you, you have to say, "What's the number one in priority in my life?" You cannot serve both God and money. It's an impossibility. You see, you get so busy taking care of things; you don't have time to take care of people. And that's a problem. The most important decision you're going to have to make in life once you become a believer is, "Am I going to be a kingdom-builder or am I going to be a wealth-builder?" Now if God wants to give you wealth, that's great. That's wonderful, but it should not be the number one goal of your life. Because the wealth you're not taking with you to heaven, but your character you are. So you say, "I'm going to be a kingdom-builder." You put that first and let God take care of whatever He wants you to do. If your job is keeping you from having any kind of service, you need to make some kind of adjustment.

Another barrier is comparing and criticizing. When you compare to others, when you criticize others, that is a barrier that gets in the way for all of us of being servants of God. Competition with each other in service, it just doesn't make sense when you come right down to it. We're on the same team. We have the same goal. We're trying to make God look good to the world. And He's given us different abilities, different tasks. And to think that somehow we can compare or criticize in that is pretty ridiculous. Realize that any time spent in comparing and criticizing is time I could have spent being grateful for all that God has done. We must begin to live for God's approval, not other people's approval, for an audience of One. Comparing and criticizing get in the way..

The final barrier is wrong motivations. The Bible talks about this in Matt. 6:1. Jesus said, "When you do good deeds, don't try to show off. If you do, you won't get a reward from your Father in heaven". Self-promotion and servanthood don't mix, but it's easy to get them mixed up. A lot of our service, let's just be honest, it can be self-serving at times. We need to be honest with ourselves about that. We serve to get others to like us. We serve to be admired. We serve to achieve our own goals. We serve as sort of a bargaining chip with God. "God, I'll serve and You take care of me here." All kinds of wrong motivations. We're serving, but all the time we're serving, we're thinking about how noble we are. We're humble, but all the time we're humble we're thinking pridefully about how humble we are! That's the struggle of service.

Let's admit it, sometimes servanthood is just our way to try to manipulate God. And it's hard to see the wrong motivations in us. I have them, you have them. How do you know? Wrong motivations don't last. That's the problem with them. Wrong motivations get us caught up with the wrong things. But there are some good motivators that can keep up serving for a lifetime.

Now I need to be honest with you this morning. When that call came to me from the DS, I encountered and experienced every one of these barriers.

Self-centeredness

Perfectionism

Materialism

Competition

Wrong motivations

I was able to break those barriers and do that which I had been called on to do.

What is God calling you to do? That is the question. Not is He calling you, because He calls us all, but what is he calling you to do?

Let me give you a little quiz. Let's see if you know these. Do you know the name of the person that greeted you or helped you find a seat when you were coming in? Do you know who is looking after your children right now? Do you know the names of the singers and musicians who were here on this stage a few minutes ago? Do you know the people in the sound booth producing the sound you hear and this video image right now? Do you know the people who stuffed the bulletin you're holding? The truth is, all of them were done by anonymous volunteers. They're the hidden heroes. And it's all important.

Now I know what some of you are saying. "Well you know, a church this size, it doesn't need my help. We have plenty of volunteers. Or we have a staff person to do this or that." Are you kidding? Spend a day with me. I'll show you a couple hundred unmet needs. Because there are always more needs to be met than people willing to get up off their seat and say, "I was made to serve Christ." Have you ever wondered why you're here at Sterling UMC? I'll tell you why. You're here because God knew you had something to give back. He did not bring you here just to sit and soak and enjoy. He

brought you here to serve. And He knew that you have something – background, talent, skill, ability, contact, or whatever, interest, hobby, whatever. God brought you here for a reason.

So the question is, How will God use you?

Now listen, when you boil it all down, you can do two things with your life. You can waste it, or you can invest it. The best use of life is to invest it in that which is going to outlast it. It's going to pay dividends over the long haul. I don't know if you've realized this or not, but not every investment here on earth pays off. Has anybody figured that one out?

One day you're going to stand before God and He's going to say to you, "What did you do with what I gave you, the talents, the abilities, the background, the experiences, the freedom, the education, the family experiences? "Well, God, I was a little busy with my ambitions and plan. I never got around to serving You." And God's going to say, "Wrong answer! What were you thinking? Do you think I put you on earth to live for yourself? I put you here to serve Me by serving others."

It's time for us to get out of the boat, and break down the barriers, and answer His call to serve Him by serving others. Is there anything in your schedule where you're giving back unselfishly, or are you too busy? Are you waiting for things to slow down? Or do you have other priorities? One day Napoleon pointed at a map of China and he said, "There lies a sleeping giant. If it ever wakes up it will shake the world." Every weekend I look at the Sterling Church family and I say, "There sits a sleeping giant. If everybody who came here served here, what kind of enormous, spiritual, nuclear reaction would we see in Sterling and the world?" I make no apology in saying to you that the most important thing you'll ever do with your life is serving God in ministry. It's far more important than your career, it's far more important than your hobbies, it's even more important than everything else you can think of because they aren't going to last. But this is. You were put here on earth to practice serving.

Let's bow our heads. Would you pray this?

Father I realize that I was shaped to serve You by serving others. Forgive me for the times I've put a "do not disturb" sign on my heart. Help me to see the interruptions as opportunities to serve. Help me to make time for what matters most. You've been so good to me. I want to give something back. I want to serve You freely and gratefully and faithfully, and I want to practice before I get to heaven so one day I can hear You say "Well done, good and faithful servant". In Your name I pray, Amen