

In our culture, "me and mine" are often more important than "you or them." From People magazine's cover to press conferences and political hearings to maximize the spin cycle of the internet and television news, we see the dramatic fight for many to stand in the brightest spotlight. Political debate no longer discusses differences of ideas but destroys and steamrolls to get "my way!" Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and group texts have made it easy to say: "Look at me. Listen to me." And in an ego-centric world, there are countless other temptations to slip into a sense of feeling "it's all about me!" We know the drill and daily watch the results.

Remember that first exercise of free will that occurred in the Garden of Eden? "Shall I choose what God offers or what I want?" But such is life – and "ME and MINE" are words that often determine our priorities. A word to describe such living is "IDOLATRY," for such living says, "My needs are more important than yours or God's!" And anytime we are the most important thing of all, we have created an idol or false god.

Jeremiah was attacked because God's message got in way of selfish lives. His congregation said, *"let's cut down this tree so we don't have to listen to what we don't want to hear."* James wrote, *"You can't have so you kill! You can't get so you wage war!"* His point was that we think more highly of ourselves than anyone else – and such thinking often becomes destructive, whether intentional or not.

Jesus was headed toward Jerusalem to die, and his disciples were fighting about which of them was the most important. Jesus was preparing to surrender everything out of love, and his disciples were shouting, *"It's all about me!"* Jesus pulled them off to the side, saying, "Let's talk about true greatness; and asked, "Who is willing to surrender all for the weakest in our midst?" Who can love another more than self?

Adam and Eve had the same God talk when they chose to ignore God and put themselves first. We struggle daily with the same results. Whether intentional or not, healthy lives, gifts and potentials are destroyed for no reason other than "MY needs, importance, wants and desires."

Why kill a mature tree, a loving congregation, a healthy marriage, a budding friendship, just to allow selfishness to rear its ugly head? Why ignore a loving God? Why turn our backs on people deemed to be less important or useful than me? How many healthy things are destroyed because MY need drives actions rather than my service? *Jesus came to reverse the trend, to heal our brokenness, to restore life! Taking a towel (a symbol of servanthood) he washed his subjects' feet. Taking a cross (the ultimate symbol of death) he made that his throne! Taking a tomb (a burial ground for all that decays) he made LIFE! Rather than say "look at me" he looked at us with love!*

Our response is to be quite simple. Rather than destroying or ignoring what doesn't serve ME, we are called to look toward God and "neighbor." Jesus proclaimed true greatness is found in serving, not being served. True fulfillment is in sharing gifts, not demanding more for me. True glory is giving what isn't expected and sharing what isn't deserved. And that also means allowing others the chance to serve me, as well! (Remember, we aren't the only ones who get to wash feet!)

We lament the lack of civility and conversation in politics and every aspect of our culture. But the Church is not immune from such selfishness either. When our own denomination, many years ago, was in the middle of a divisive conflict, church leaders gathered to seek possible solutions to the conflict. One came up with a simple idea to help them find a way in a meeting where their divisions were angry and deep. He printed little pins that simply said, *"I might be wrong, you might be right, let's talk."*

Of the 40 pastors at that meeting only 20 were willing to even wear such a pin. And as one would expect, without a willingness to respectfully listen the conflict only intensified. In midst of disciples struggling with their perceived self-importance, Jesus lifted a nameless child; a life that had no meaning in his culture. He said, "the least is more important than the greatest," as he prepared to die for you and for me! Rather than say "I am the greatest!" Jesus proclaimed; your life is more important than mine! Rather than "look at me" he promised "I will never stop looking for you!"

One of our ministries involves sheets and pillowcases being sewn into beautifully simple, practical, and unique dresses. Such dresses are gathered from similar groups like ours throughout the country and several times a year are shipped to villages in Africa. Every week we have people who collect food for the hungry in our community. Several times a year we gather school supplies for children and articles for the homeless. We have a group who meets every Wednesday to use scraps of donated material and sew them into beautiful quilts and baby layettes that are distributed throughout the world. Our ministry on campus and the State Hospital is a similar outreach. And these are just a few ways that we seek to embrace servant love.

None of these would be considered glamorous undertakings, and yet what powerful gifts of love these all become. It is amazing what happens when we begin to live as if life is not all about me!"

Look at the difference between past Presidents of our country. Some live as celebrities, with big mansions, countless dinners with the Hollywood elite or the most powerful leaders of our land. And then there is someone like Jimmy Carter, who even into his 90's teaches a weekly Bible Class and spends weekdays as a carpenter for Habitat for Humanity. He is one whose faith leads him to say, "it isn't about me

Jesus deserved to say, "it IS about me," and yet he used that moment to surrender and serve. He used that moment to lift selfish, dying people like you and me. He climbed onto a cross saying, "This is true greatness – to surrender even the life of God's own son as a sacrifice for all."

His surrender not only set us free but offered a model for a new life of servant love. As followers of Jesus, our call is to follow. Not just to grab for gifts of grace, but to live by sharing grace – even for the least, and especially for the most undeserving. We are called to serve as we have been served because it is not about me. In other words, hug some children and wash some feet. Amen.