

Are You a Philosopher? John 12: 20-33

Two men went up in a hot-air balloon one May morning. Suddenly they were enveloped by clouds and lost track of where they were. They drifted for what seemed like hours. Finally the cloud parted, and they spotted a man below them on the ground.

"Where are we?" one of the passengers hollered down. The man on the ground looked around, looked up at the balloon, looked around some more and then yelled back, "You're in a balloon."

The two balloonists looked at one another and then one of them yelled down again, "Are you a philosopher?"

"Yes," the man hollered up from below.

The other balloonist said, "How did you know he was a philosopher?" His friend replied, "No one else could give an answer so quickly that's so logical and yet tells you so little about where you are and where you want to be!" ("On Being Religious", Donald J. Shelby, May 27, 1984).

I don't want to be hard on philosophers. But if that story has any hint of truth, Jesus was not a philosopher. He dealt in paradox, which is a favorite tool of philosophers, in seeking truth. Yet, he had a way of using the simplest examples from daily life to make plain the truth of his paradoxes.

If you're going to find your life, you're going to have to lose it, he said. "It is only in giving that you receive." "If you want to be first, you must become last." "If you're going to be master, you must become a servant." And all of those paradoxes are wrapped in one: We must die if we want to live.

Jesus calls us to live a life of a servant for others. We often grumble and find reasons why we do not want to let go of a dream or an idea of what we think life should be like.

A graduating student at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, had just received his appointment from the bishop. He was grouching and grumbling because the appointment didn't fit what he felt he deserved.

Another student, in a loving but unsympathetic way patted him on the back and said, "You know the world is a better place because Michelangelo didn't say, 'I don't do ceilings.'" He lifted up Jesus for his friend to see, because he understood that To Serve Is To Follow.

And if you stop to think about it, that's the spirit of servanthood. The world is a better place because a German monk named Martin Luther didn't say, "I don't do doors."

The world is a better place, because an Oxford don named John Wesley didn't say, "I don't do fields."

Go from the beginning of the Bible to the end, and you will see over and over again the story of men and women who had servant hearts, minds and spirits. And the world is a better place, because:

Moses didn't say, "I don't do rivers."
Noah didn't say, "I don't do arks."
Jeremiah didn't say, "I don't do weeping."
Amos didn't say, "I don't do speeches."
Rahab didn't say, "I don't do carpets."
Ruth didn't say, "I don't do mothers-in-law."
David didn't say, "I don't do giants."
Mary didn't say, "I don't do virgin births."
Mary Magdalene didn't say, "I don't do feet."
John didn't say, "I don't do deserts."
Peter didn't say, "I don't do Gentiles."
Paul didn't say, "I don't do letters."
Jesus didn't say, "I don't do crosses."

What is Jesus putting on your heart that you may be struggling with today? Jesus calls us to become a servant." Jesus tells us we must die if we want to live. Do we trust Jesus enough to take up our cross and follow him? May we give up the things that keep us from becoming the person Jesus is calling us to be. Amen.

God bless,
Pastor Barbara