

THE TABLE OF SELF-GIVING

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Phil. 2:5-3:1

In the last several sermons I have talked about influence, how we all have it, maybe not a lot but we have some, and we can in our own little way try to use it with Christ and for Christ. We influence a waiter or waitress by how we speak to them, the person in the pew next to us by whether we're hospitable or grouchy, the grandchild we send a note to and pray for.

We talked about some precious models of faith and influence and how they inspire us. For me it was Will and Marion, old-timers who gave and received help simply with dignity. One with Parkinson's was being fed by the one who could only see a few feet in front of him. Without fanfare, simply, full of dignity ... helping and being helped.

This is the essence of servant influence Christ talks about. It is both helping and being helped. If you have ever just been helped, and helped, and helped without any way to contribute, you know that there's a part of you that's not being served, a part that has to do with your value and dignity.

Jesus talked about servant influence in his last days and last supper. He was in essence a servant AND he is the greatest influencer in human history.

That last supper is with us today in the form of this communion table. From that last supper we to this day conduct the communion meal.

In front of this table I'd like to bore down into this matter of influence, of servanthood, of the table, and of Jesus.

Pray and Read.

The letter is written from prison, hard circumstances, and you might think of those places that you have experienced being chained or locked up in your own life, and yet from within these hard circumstances emanates joy and affection. I think we'd all like to know what accounts for this. We'd like to be able to have *that* operate in our lives, right?

There is an answer. Two words connected by a hyphen. Self-giving.

Jesus, the second chapter tells us, emptied himself and died *for us*. Him *for us*. He gave himself for us. He didn't leave heaven for earth just to go on a trip or have another experience. He extended and expended himself for us.

Men and women from across the United States have left the comfort of their own homes because of the plight of those in Houston. They're not going to that flooded place for their pleasure but to help those under pressure. It's about self-giving. When they returned from Andrew and Katrina and now, when they return from Harvey, those relief workers will be tired ... but rich *because that is the way self-giving is*.

Jesus was all about, his influence emanates from ... self-giving. It taps into the richness of life. It is what this table means.

Paul, emulates Jesus and we read him saying, if I am poured out like a drink offering for you, I am glad. Paul poured out *for them*. Jesus, Him for us. Now Paul for them. When Jesus gives himself to us, his life spills on to us, his life enters us and that life that spills on us and enters us is a self-giving life. And it not only

gives us life, the life it generates in us is a self-giving life.

Maybe you've gotten that purple cleaner on you with PCV pipes, it splashes on you and stains you. Jesus on you with self-giving, it's like that. Or you've eaten garlic and it's absorbed into you. Jesus in you with self-giving, it's like that. The self-giving Jesus turns Paul into a self-giving Paul.

Time and again, the recovery group leader, the addiction counselor, you ask, "Why are you doing this for others?" He answers, she answers, "Because someone did it for me." Jesus, Him for Paul leads to Paul for the Philippians, him for them. Your influence for another and that's what Jesus did and what this table means.

The third reading tells us that the Philippians shared in Paul's troubles and sent him aid again and again. Them *for him*. Him for us. Paul for them. Now *them for Paul*. All of it self-giving.

The way out of prison is that way of Jesus and that is the way plain giving over getting, self-giving.

This week we had the Rev. Nate Steury with us in the Wednesday Bible Study. Nate and his wife, Elinda, lived for about 20 years in Florida pastoring, from Marathon in the Keys to Indialantic just up the way. He told of how twin boys, brand new infants, lost their mother and had no father. He and Elinda, with a full schedule, with their own four children already raised, took them in and cared for them. That's self-giving. They thought it would be for a few weeks but it went on for two years plus. That's self-giving.

The boys were recently adopted. Elinda and Nate had become quite close to the little boys. But again in self-giving they considered the welfare of the boys and the well-being of the young, adoptive parents. Putting their own hearts aside, in self-giving, they blessed the adoption. This is self-giving that gave those boys life.

It goes Jesus for us, Paul for them, Them for Paul. And now us to each other.

It's Labor Day weekend and may our labor not be just for ourselves, let us thank God for our health and work that he has given us not just for ourselves but with which to be our neighbor's keeper, to know the joy and affection of life from that self-giving.

It's the communion table and what we eat and drink is Jesus, the self-giving Jesus. Self-giving will come into you and will nourish you and strengthen you ... to be self-giving ... and alive too.

If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call.

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