

**2016 SYNOD ASSEMBLY
The Rev. Steven L. Ullestad**

SERMON

Thank you for giving the work of this synod your commitment in so many ways including your investment this weekend. I am grateful.

SLIDE Our readings for tonight were chosen to fit our theme of Celebrating Renewal, highlighting the value that service has in the renewal of us as individuals and as Christian community by looking at the witness of St. Elizabeth of Hungary (our companion synod).cc

I ask you to notice with me a bit from our readings and then I'm going to invite you into the most unusual sermon illustration that I have ever attempted. Remember-I warned you.

SLIDE The first reading is the servant psalm from Isaiah.

The first verses tell us that the servant will never grow weary
Then we hear God's call

SLIDE

⁶I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,

SLIDE

⁷to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

SLIDE The first of 4 in Isaiah, in this one God is speaking of selecting the servant to bring justice to earth. The servant is God's agent of justice that is established neither by quietly and confidently giving faith.

SLIDE Psalm 146 picks up on these themes:

⁵ Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God,

SLIDE

⁶who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them;
who keeps promises forever;

SLIDE

⁷who gives justice to those who are oppressed, and food to those who hunger. The Lord sets the captive free.

SLIDE

⁸The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.

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⁹The Lord cares for the stranger;

the Lord sustains the orphan and widow, but frustrates the way of the wicked.

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The Philippians reading is one frequently selected for ordination services (including mine):

SLIDE

¹If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy,
²make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

SLIDE ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

SLIDE

⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,

SLIDE

being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.

SLIDE This is how God's work is accomplished through Jesus Christ.

Empty yourself and take on the form of a slave.

SLIDE And the Gospel:

James and John seek privilege. Jesus seeks service.

SLIDE "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.

SLIDE ⁴³But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

SLIDE ⁴⁵For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

SLIDE A request for power from James and John creates an argument and misses the mark completely. Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left in your glory! You couldn't do it. But there will be one at the right and left when I enter my glory.

Jesus does not grant their request by naming them to be the ones on his right and left as he enters the kingdom.

SLIDE (Pic fades to 3 crosses) We who live on the other side of the crucifixion know who was on Jesus right and left when he enters his

glory. Two thieves, one on the right and one on the left. Two sinners. To his death, that is where you will find Jesus, in the midst of sinners.

He goes on using the example about how Gentiles about rule. And these remarkable words:

SLIDE Came to serve and not be served. Serve, serve, serve, serve.

Service cannot be separated from faith because it allows us to be who God has created us to be.

SLIDE Now the unusual illustrations. I attended a leadership symposium for Unity Point Health. I have the privilege of serving on the Unity Point Board in Waterloo on your behalf. It is always a learning experience but also an opportunity to be an advocate for community health in the Cedar Valley and also in the surrounding rural areas.

Jack Canfield was the presenter. MORE INTRO???

SLIDE He invited a person onto the stage to stand with him so I'll do the same (though he has done this hundreds of times and this is my first try). Someone please join me. I promise not to hurt you.

Muscle Testing Demo

SLIDE

1. Arm pressure down

My name is _____ (real name)-arm is strong

My name is _____ (not real name)-arm goes down

Lying makes you physically weaker.

2. Think about failure-arm goes down

Think about success-arm is strong

Focusing on failure makes you weak.

3. I can't do it-arm goes down

I can-arm is strong

Not believing in your God-given abilities makes you weak.

4. Send negative thought-arm goes down

Send positive thought-arm is strong

The power of being in your thoughts and prayers. Our Vice President can give that testimony.

5. Bring 5 more on stage, hold hands and think positive

One person thinks negative-arms drop

One person thinks positive-arms strong

Power of negativity in the community.

6. Goal only serves me-arms drop

Goal serves others-arm is strong

We are strongest when our prayers are with you, when we are all in it together as a Christian community, when we are here to serve not preserve ourselves. The scripture is clear from Isaiah to Jesus. We, like Jesus, are here to serve, not be served and give ourselves to others.

Amen.