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ANSWERING THE PRIME DIRECTIVE Michael B. Beough
I Peter 4:7-11 September 21, 2008
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“It’s All about Me.” (film clip available at www.sermonspice.com)

That’s funny! Maybe you know someone like that. But here is the truth. We know that life is not all about me. It is just that we act like it sometimes. We get to feeling that *if I don’t look out for number one, nobody else will.*

But deep down inside we know that life includes relationships, caring for other people, working for larger causes, giving up what we want so others can have what they need. Right? Of course we do!

Here is something else deep down inside some of us have discovered. We have a hunger to live a significant life. We want our lives to count for something, something that goes beyond the jobs we work or the pastimes we engage in or the same routine day after day.

I want to be able to stand before Christ in the great hereafter and hand over to him the fruits of my labor as a gift of my life. I hope that when I get to heaven, I will be able to look down and see the continuing thread of what I did on earth playing out into the future. I want to see that I made a difference, not by my own power or wisdom, but by the power and wisdom of Christ living in me. Actually, I want to see Christ glorified because I walked on this earth.

Our Scripture passage today is about how God answers this hunger for significance. **The way God answers this hunger for significance is by calling us to be servants.**

In I Peter, chapter 4, verse 10, Peter writes, *“Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.”* He is writing to Christians who had every reason to give up on life. They are experiencing grievous suffering because of their belief in Jesus. Talk about losing a sense of significance, wondering if God cares, or if God is still in control! Their world is crashing around them. Every day, they are exposed to the persecution of the state. They experience the terror of being fired from their jobs simply because they believe in Jesus. Every day they are confronted by the temptation to abandon Christ and turn back to the empty gods of the culture. Every day they pass the temple prostitutes who try to lure them into a cult of selfish pleasure.

And here is Peter’s advice for them. *Serve one another.* He doesn’t advise them to duck and cover, to abandon ship, every man for himself, to

run for the hills. His answer to all the turbulence in their lives is to serve one another. To be servants.

This theme runs throughout I Peter. Back in chapter 2, verses 16 & 17, he writes, "*As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.*"

Be a servant. **This is our Prime Directive as followers of Jesus.** To go and make a difference by presenting Christ and meeting the needs of others.

Peter is on solid ground here. Jesus said he came, not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. He told his disciples repeatedly that they weren't recruited to be the grand poobahs of the kingdom of heaven; they weren't recruited to be spectators and mere consumers of God's grace; they were recruited to play the game, to be servants, like him. Look at Ephesians 2:10. It even says this is our purpose in life. It is why God has called us into the church. "*For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.*"

Today we are talking about service as one of the three legs on the Ancient Modern Discipleship stool. If you want a balanced spiritual life that can sustain you when life goes crazy, you need all three legs. If you want a spiritual foundation on which to build a meaningful life, you need all three legs. If you want a sturdy spiritual launching pad that can propel you into an adventure you haven't even imagined yet, you need all three legs – Worship, Growth, and Service.

I have said it many times. Our decision to follow Jesus always leads to deployment in service and missions. A growing, healthy relationship with God always frees us from self-absorption to servanthood, serving others by serving the cause of God.

Here is how we say it in our mission statement: *We are making and growing disciples of Jesus Christ who give their lives to make a difference in the world.*

But let's focus on another thing Peter writes in verse 10.

"Serve one another with *whatever gift each of you has received.*" God doesn't just hope we will become servants. God gives us particular gifts for service.

Do you want to live a fulfilling and significant life? Then find your gifts and use them in service to Christ's church and to the world.

I'll never forget what the head of the economics department at Harvard told us at a leadership conference last year. He said we in the church are wasting a lot of potential by putting the wrong people in the wrong jobs. He is an efficiency expert. We need to get people to use their talents where they can do the most good. As an example, he said if we want to address the issue of poverty in a poor village somewhere in the world, don't send a C.E.O. in your congregation to dig a ditch. Ask the C.E.O. to organize and manage the project because that is what he or she is good at.

In the church, we typically create jobs and then guilt someone into filling the spot. Instead, we need to ask people to discern their gifts and then let them loose to do what they are good at and what they enjoying doing, as long as it serves the church's mission and purposes of God.

Take Mike, for example. His story is told in a book called "Growing an Engaged Church."

Mike and his wife Janet are engaged members of their church. One thing he does is to meet with a small men's group. "We started this men's ministry at our church, and I've been involved for about a year now. I can really see a difference in my life."

But he is also involved in leading his church's Habitat for Humanity team. He is our Barry Gibbs, but probably not as funny. Listen to what Mike says. "In my 'day job,' I'm a software engineer, but I've always loved to build things, and even worked construction during the summers I was in college. That's something most people don't know about me. But my church asked me, 'What are you good at, and what do you love to do?' when we became members. I thought about it a while, and I'm also good at organizing people, and I love to build things, and I've really been a believer in the mission of Habitat ever since I saw Jimmy Carter on the news talking about it several years ago. So I talked to the pastor about starting a team from our church. It's been one the greatest experiences of my life."

He goes on. "I wouldn't consider myself a fanatic or anything like that, and I certainly don't press my beliefs on others. It's just that without my faith, my life wouldn't be as meaningful- I'd be kind of directionless. I don't know how, but it seems that the more I've gotten involved at church, the more spiritually aware I've become. I've become more compassionate, more aware of the suffering of others, and what I can do about it. I'm a better husband and father. I'm just a better person."

My personal goal is for our church to become like the one Mike attends. In fact, we are making progress along that line. We have more and more disciples giving their lives to make a difference. I want to see 100% of our children, youth, and adults happily engaged in the mission God is calling

them to, using the gifts God has given them. With that kind of front line action, we can rock the world. Or at least we can make a difference in people's lives, the very thing God wants us to do, as servants, gifted, and aimed in the right direction.

We live in a turbulent, crazy world. Who knows what is going to happen to our economy. Who knows what is going to happen in the war on terrorism. Who knows what tomorrow may bring. God's answer to this turbulent, crazy world we live in is to send us out as His servants with the message of hope and deeds of healing and redemption.

This is such a key to our church's life that we have been in the process of identifying what we are calling a Signature Ministry. Where and how can we best serve the needs of others? What is our special role that God is giving us? Identifying this Signature Ministry and implementing it is one of the destinations on our Strategic Map. We want to be the church that gives its life to make a difference in the world.

One of our members, Mike B., has been leading a small team in thinking and praying about a Signature Ministry for our church. A Signature Ministry is *a big, highly visible constant outreach initiative that inspires the sacrifice of members and captures the imagination of the public. It provides very practical help for a targeted public.* I am going to ask him to come forward to share with you their understanding of where God wants us to go.

(Mike shared with the congregation the recommendation of his planning team. Their notion is that we create a Signature Ministry called S.A.V.E. - Southlake Area Volunteer Exchange. The tagline is "Linking and empowering community area residents with local to global mission opportunities". Our church would develop networks of volunteers throughout our communities and recruit them to accomplish significant service and missions.)