

Loving Service Speech

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As a lay person, I would resist venturing into the theological extremes of this theme because I might be exposing my inadequacies in the presence of an erudite priest and a milieu of theological scholars, practitioners and congregation. But as a social scientist and Environmentalist however, I will be better served if I can wisely drag this topic to an area where I can feel safe and protected, especially delving into the practical application of Christianity - the **involvement of the heart, the mind and the spirit** in devoting ourselves to one another as charged by St. Paul and endorsed by Christ Himself.

I have been asked to speak on "loving service." However, I have tweaked this topic to read - "Standing Up For Jesus." I looked into the Bible to find that the word **Service** and all its modifications occurred **1,427 times** while '**love**' and all its modifications occurred **558 times**. The frequencies of these two words in the Holy Book make me think that they be very important to God!

To help me accomplish this goal, I will extract from Romans, Chapter 12, verses 6-8 where the core message was that "we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophesy, in proportion of faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhorting; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness." In line with the special calling paradigm, 1 Corinthians 7:17 reiterates the message when it proclaims that "Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him."

Today, many of us hear about the term, "full-time Christian work" in expressing the distinction between one who is "full time" in God's service and another who is in "secular" work, implying an elevation to the vocational calling. This distortion is the worst form of dualism says Hillman, because we are suggesting that there is a nobler or higher calling than our "secular" works if we are truly committed to God and His service. If our claim to Christianity is true and correct, we must come to terms with what it demands - that we must 'stand up for Jesus in whatever we are doing at all times.' This means that we must be **loving-service-based!** If we adopt this theme and live by it, we can stop anybody who claims that he or she 'was called into the ministry' or that he or she 'is in full-time Christian work'; and educate him or her that 'we are all in full-time Christian work.'

Christian work is a divine giftedness. There is no separation of secular and religious in the economy of God. We must be ready to proudly claim that we are servants of the living God masquerading in our various occupations. Mother Theresa encapsulated this claim when she said that 'many people mistake our work for our vocation. Our vocation is the love of Jesus.'

Biblical injunctions about loving service are very clear. God expects those who love Him to provide service to others. By providing service to others, we become God's hands reaching out to others. God has a special place in His heart for the most vulnerable members of society and charges his followers with providing service to them. The Bible contains roughly 30 references to God's concerns for the **widow, the orphan, and the alien**. According to the Bible, these were the most vulnerable members of society and God expects His people to provide them with service (Deuteronomy 24:19). In fact God warned that He **will pass judgment on those who fail to**

provide service for the most vulnerable members of society, as shown in Mal. 3:5. How do carry out these instructions?

Follow Jesus' example: According to the Bible, Jesus spent most of his ministry providing service to others. He performed numerous miracles that meet needs, e.g., healing the blind, changing water into wine at a marriage ceremony, etc. He also provided service in meeting emotional needs, e.g., Jesus' interaction with the woman at the well (John 4:1-26). **The Bible instructs us to follow Jesus' example (I Cor. 1:11).**

Purpose & Function: The purpose of service ensures that God reaches others through our hands. In Second Cor. 9:12-13, the Bible emphasizes that the service we provide not only meets needs but expresses thanks to God and leads others to praise God. It further reiterates that "service builds up the "Body of Christ."

Significance: The Bible emphasizes the importance of providing service to others. When asked how to inherit eternal life, Jesus indicated that the two key points were 'loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself.' (See Luke 10:27.), e.g. the parable of "The Good Samaritan" (see Luke 10:25-37).

Examples: The St. Aidan's Way

1. My story with Mr. Ihejirika who gave me 10 shillings in 1971 for my exam fee. Dollar-pound exchange rates in 1971 were **\$2.4 to a pound**. Therefore 10 shillings was \$1.20. In 1971 when I was in Elementary Six at St. Mark's School Umunachi, Mr. Ihejirika was my headmaster. I was not going to take the East Central State-run common entrance examination to go to secondary school because my parents could not afford the ten shillings for the entrance fees. The impacts of the Nigerian-Biafran war were still fresh! It was Papa Ihejirika, who, reading into my abilities both in learning and character, gave me the 10 shillings with which I registered for the exam. Who could have ever thought that it was from this background that I went ahead to bag university degrees: a B.Sc. from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; two masters degrees - one from [Boston University School of Public Health](#) in Health Care Delivery, and the other from [University of Michigan School of Public Health](#) in Population Planning and International Health; and finally, a Ph.D. degree from the [University of Michigan School of Natural Resources and Environment](#).

2. A St. Aidan's family, in their quiet exemplary Christian living, have twice bought a folding walking cane for a poor, blind Christian who is the leader of the handicapped Christians in my Obowu community in Nigeria. Before this family intervened, this man would be led by his wife to every meeting he attended at the expense of their children and family. With the help of our St. Aidan's family in buying that walking stick, the poor wife was freed from that duty of guiding her husband while the man would independently walk around to his business. This man has continued to tell his story of how two Christians at St. Aidan's Church in far away America who he would never meet saved his family and energized him to do more work for God and humanity!

3. Perhaps I wouldn't have completed my doctorate at the University of Michigan if a St. Aidanite family had not intervened. Again, as caring members and having gone through academic rigors themselves, they noticed that I was struggling at writing my dissertation. They

offered me their home since nobody was home during the day time. Of course, I obliged and moved over to their house. I would stay in their house from Monday through Friday evening, and then return to my family in Ann Arbor. It was only then that I focused in to complete my dissertation with speed! I still owe a piece of that diploma to this family and St. Aidan's.

4. The annual January shelter offered by St. Aidan's to accommodate our fellow less privileged brothers in Ann Arbor. I hate to use the word the 'homeless' in qualifying them. In the last four years I have participated in the shelter, one of us from St. Aidan's has always been the Overseer of that program. What she does is worthy to be chronicled. She would carry and do the laundry for these brothers. She would be there late in the night on the nights that she was not serving to make sure the coffee and everything was set. Early in the morning, she would be there again to make the coffee, do the dishes and help in cleaning up!

5. Her widow's mite: Unbeknown to many of us, one of our nonagenarians has been frequently donating \$25 for the education of some poor children of my village in Nigeria.

Christ shepherds us into new life and service. He gives us the tools and impetus to go beyond ourselves. Preempting our Episcopal dismissal prayer, may I be permitted to end this presentation with these words:

[Let us] Go out into the world in peace, having courage; holding unto what is good; returning no one evil for evil; strengthening the faint-hearted; supporting the weak; helping the suffering; honoring everyone; loving and serving God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit, ...Amen