

**Christians: Use Your Time
to Seek Greatness!
Sermon on Luke 22:24-30
Saint Mark's, Watertown
Pastor Karl Walther
October 12, 2008**

Introduction: Is Church Like Politics?

Jesus once said: *Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.* Amen.

Dear fellow Christians—eager to use your time for Christ and for others:

Well, we are right in the thick of the political season—aren't we? We are less than four weeks away from a hotly contested presidential election, not to mention all the House and Senate races, all the gubernatorial races, and all the other state and local elections soon to take place.

I'm not going to comment on any of those today—well, except to say that I hope very many of you take your Christian perspective with you into the voting booth. But I do want to use politics as a springboard into God's Word to us today.

My question is this: What makes a person – Democrat or Republican, it doesn't matter – What makes a person want to run for office? That's an interesting question, isn't it? And I'm sure it has a variety of answers. I imagine many office seekers really want to be of help to their constituents. I imagine others feel that they are the best and the brightest and that people like them need to take the reigns of power. And then, we can't deny that others have less noble interests: it may be a way for them to gain wealth for themselves, or to gain fame for themselves. Or they may even just have a desire to lord it over others.

So, is it that way in church? That's a good question, too, isn't it? Those who serve in church—What's their attitude? What should their attitude be? And should all of us desire to join them?

Theme: Christians: Use Your Time to Seek Greatness!

Well, today we begin a three-week look at stewardship: the use of our time, talents, and treasures for Jesus and for others. And today we're going to consider some of what Jesus says regarding the use of our time. It might surprise you that he directs us: **USE YOUR TIME TO SEEK GREATNESS!** It won't surprise you, though, that this means: 1) **EAGERLY AVOID QUARRELING OVER RANK**, 2) **EAGERLY WORK AT SERVING OTHERS**, and 3) **EAGERLY PARTICIPATE IN CHRIST'S KINGDOM**.

Part One: Eagerly Avoid Quarreling Over Rank

God's Word for the sermon today is our Gospel Reading: Luke chapter twenty-two, verses twenty-four through thirty. It's Maundy Thursday evening, and the scene is the Upper Room in Jerusalem. Jesus is gathered with his apostles. And we read: *Also a dispute* – literally: *an eagerness to quarrel* – *arose among them* – the apostles – *as to which of them was considered to be greatest*. In fact, maybe that's how they kept things civil. They didn't argue who was the greatest, but who was considered to be the greatest. Still, the argument was over rank or importance.

Jesus was not pleased. *Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles* – the nearest one of them would have been Herod – *they lord it over them; and those who*

exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors—literally: *do-gooders*, as if the magnificence of these personages was established by sharing their great talent with those less fortunate.

But you are not to be like that, Jesus comments—because when you are, it’s all about me: my wisdom, my generosity, my intelligence, my goodness. And what’s not selflessly done for Christ is selfish. And what’s selfish is sinful.

That’s certainly true of our lives, too, isn’t it?

How do you use your time? Is it to take it easy, as much as possible, or is it to serve others and to serve God? Do you use your time to make a comfortable living, as much as possible, or is it to serve God and to serve others? Is all your time – beyond, let’s say, the requisite forty hours a week for work – is all your time for you, or is it for God? And what would God, who gave us all our time, think of that?

And then, even when we are doing good for God and for others, why are we doing it? Is it to make us feel good? Is it for our benefit or bank account or name recognition? And again: What would the timeless God think of that?

I don’t know about you – well, yeah, I guess I actually do – but I know the answers to those questions for me. And they lead me to cringe and to say, “God have mercy on me, a sinner!”

Part Two: Eagerly Work at Serving Others

There is a better route, though. It’s one that Jesus makes clear in the next words he speaks. He says: *Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest*—the least senior, the one who gets all the tasks the others don’t want, and cheerfully does them. *And the one who rules should be like the one who serves*. And notice how well that’s worded. The one who leads still needs to lead. It’s his responsibility. God has given it to him. But he’s going to lead with a servant attitude—like the one who serves.

And that gives us something to shoot for, doesn’t it? Jesus wants us pursuing greatness: his kind of greatness—not a high rank, but rather a greatness of service toward him and toward others. It’s Jesus himself who puts people in positions of leadership—not to lord it over anyone, but rather properly to use their authority in order to serve.

So, do use your time to pursue greatness: Jesus’ kind of greatness. Children, pursue greatness: by being alert to the needs in your family and offering to help your parents with them. Students, pursue greatness: by trying to contribute to the learning environment of your classroom. Young people, pursue greatness: by looking for an occupation less to make a comfortable living and more for the service to people and to God which you can render. Workers, pursue greatness: by contributing to the legitimate goals of your company. Husbands and wives, pursue greatness: by helping your spouse to be the best Christian person they can possibly be. Parents, pursue greatness: by never tiring of instructing your children in Christ, in what’s right and what’s wrong, and never tiring of loving them. Retirees, pursue greatness: if you’re healthy enough, take your time to contribute to the lives of your grandchildren or great-grandchildren, or to become an indispensable volunteer in some worthwhile endeavor.

But whoa!—that’s going to take some energy! and some selflessness! and especially, when somebody accuses you of selfishness or pride or a desire to lord it over them! Where are you going to find the energy to endure in your efforts to keep serving others?

Listen to Jesus! He says: *For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves* the other who is reclining at the table? *Is it not the one who is reclining*

at the table who is the greater one? Of course! **But** get this—Jesus says: ***I am among you as one who serves.***

And there it is – did you catch it? – all the reason you need to keep on serving others and serving Christ! Jesus ... has served you so well.

Jesus had just served his disciples. The verses immediately before this have him serving them Holy Communion for the very first time. He still does that for you! Jesus – Lord of the universe, living and ruling as the enabling force for all of creation – that Jesus loves you and takes his time to serve you a banquet of salvation in Lord’s Supper. When you take your time to receive it, you receive his very body and blood which live to plead for you before God’s throne in heaven above.

And Jesus would also serve his disciples afterwards. The chapters immediately after this have Jesus marching steadfastly forward: to pray, to be betrayed, to be misjudged, to suffer hell, and to die—for all our greed and pride and self-importance and selfishness, for all our sinfulness.

For him—for him, you are willing to serve others forever.

Part Three: Eagerly Participate in Christ’s Kingdom

But Jesus gives us just a little more ammunition against our Old Adam. In case our old sinful nature wears on us, saying, “It’s useless, all your work; you’re no more than a slave, and an unappreciated one at that, and it’s never going to end”—well, listen to what Jesus says to his apostles! ***You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*** Jesus promised to all the apostles hard labor an eternal reward of grace.

In the same way, if you’re a student, your time of rest will come: no, not when you get out of school, but when you get to learn of Jesus in his own presence in glory. If you’re a worker, your time of rest will come: no, not when you retire, but when you enter into celestial rest forever. If you’re a family member, your time of rest will come; no, not when the kids leave the home, but when you enter into your heavenly home. And if you’re a retiree, your time of rest is coming soon, when Jesus comes for you.

And when we get to glory, none of us will ever regret all the effort we put in here, to serve others and to serve our Lord.

Conclusion: The Church Is Not Like Most Politics!

So, why does a person enter into politics? Well, don’t ask me!—although I admire capable Christians who do get into politics, and particularly for the purpose of protecting our freedom to proclaim the gospel.

But why does a Christian serve the Savior? Or even more pointedly: Why do our greeters greet and our ushers usher and our choirs sing and our school’s helpers volunteer and our ladies serve and our board and council members lead? Well, that I know.... Christ Jesus spent time for them on the cross. They want that message proclaimed for others. Christ Jesus rose to give them an eternity of time with him in heaven. They want that message proclaimed for others.

As God gives you strength, join them in their labors! Amen.

Jesus once said: *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* Amen.