

"Live as examples of Christ Jesus"

Devotions for Deacons

Title: The Charge to the Deacon

Scripture: Matthew 11: 28-30

"Live as Examples of Jesus."

It is a short phrase, found near the end of the charge to the deacons. It almost seems easy to miss it. It follows quite an overwhelming list:

Inspire faithful stewardship.

Teach us to be merciful.

Prompt us...to worship God with offerings.

Minister to rich and poor alike.

Weigh the needs of causes and use the church's resources discerningly.

Be compassionate to the needy.

Respect their need for dignity.

Encourage [the needy] with words that create hope.

Encourage them with deeds that bring joy.

Be prophetic critics of waste, injustice, and selfishness in our society.

Be sensitive counselors to victims of those evils.

And there is more. Make sure that your lives are above reproach and that you live as examples of Jesus. There it is again, that little phrase. Really, every part of the charge to deacons is about being *like* Jesus, and living as He lived. What an impossible standard that is. Can all those things really be expected of us?

Yet to every deacon Jesus says,

"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened"

When you do not know how to love someone. When you do not know how to help. When you have been out every night this week. When you just do not have the right words to say. When you cannot sleep because you are weighed down by sadness and suffering.

Jesus says, "I will give you rest."

Lay those burdens, that busyness, that sadness, those doubts on Jesus. He will help you carry them. He will help you carry them so that you may rest in His love, and find joy in your serving.

Jesus asks you to "Take my yoke upon you"

This calling, this Kingdom "yoke," is not going to be easy. But it is *His* yoke, and He will equip you.

And Jesus says to "learn from me"

Jesus' walk, His life, His love –these stories are how you will know how to be deacons.

Jesus was "gentle and humble in heart"

So follow Him in obedience and love.

And "you will find rest for your souls"

Once you learn from Jesus, from His life and ministry-

Once you follow Jesus into your calling as a deacon-

You will find that His "yoke is easy and His burden is light."

Praise God!

“Really, every part of the charge to the deacons is about being like Jesus, and living as He lived.”

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Devotions for Deacons

Title: Inspire Faithful Stewardship

Scripture: Luke 19:1-10

Text: Luke 12:48b

“Only the Holy Spirit will provide us with the opportunities to inspire people to serve and to give.”

Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus. He wants it so much that he goes to great lengths to make sure it happens—even if he looks ridiculous up there in that tree. He does not realize, though, that it is *Jesus* who will see *him*. Jesus will see Zacchaeus for who he really is and what is in his heart.

The people are crowding Jesus on all sides, and everyone wants to be near Him. But Jesus takes little notice of the crowds. He is focused on Zacchaeus—on being with a man who is despised by those crowds. Jesus calls him by name, and, what is more, tells Zacchaeus that He will stay at his house. Though Zacchaeus welcomes Him gladly, the crowds begin to mutter about Jesus taking special notice of such a sinner. A chief tax collector, no less!

Zacchaeus responds. He is eager to prove that he has already been touched by this encounter with Jesus. He stands up, making his words as emphatic as he can. But he does not address the muttering crowds. To Jesus alone, he declares that he will give away half of his wealth and pay back four times the amount he has cheated anyone.

Zacchaeus is a changed man. Jesus makes that clear. It is also clear that Zacchaeus was changed because he was touched and inspired by Jesus—the One who came to seek *him* out, who even wanted to stay at the house of this hated man.

What would it be like to inspire people like that?

Think of how our church’s ministry in its community could be impacted if the congregation entrusted half of its wealth to the deacons. Or even a quarter! Although Jesus reminds His disciples in Luke 12 that “from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded,” we know that reminders are often not enough. We remind the congregation about offerings; we remind each other about stewardship. However, if *we inspire* each other, much like Jesus inspired Zacchaeus, amazing things will happen!

How does Jesus inspire? First of all, He communicates truth. People recognize His authority and the weight of His words. Even more, His life is living proof of the power of those words! Though He is distinctly different from those around Him, He does not maintain His distance from them. He cares deeply about everyone from His most loyal friends to the “chief of sinners”!

As deacons, we are placed in a position to inspire. We inspire with the truth. We inspire with our lives and with our words. By our actions. And by our love. But praise God that we do not do any of this on our own!

So pray constantly for the Holy Spirit to guide us to the opportunities that He alone will provide. Then, like Jesus, we will challenge and inspire those around us in the ways we have been equipped. And trust that the Holy Spirit will do the rest: changing hearts to serve and to give.

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Devotions for Deacons

Title: Teach Us to be Merciful

Scripture: Luke 5: 12-15

Text: James 2:12-13

“With Jesus’ example before you, His love in your heart and a prayer on your lips, you will begin to show mercy.”

“Lord, if you are willing, make me clean.” These words are probably full of anguish; yet underneath of the pain, there is probably also faint hope –hope that Jesus will have mercy on this man who is lying at His feet. The man does not directly ask for healing; he asks to be made clean. This is a man with leprosy.

Like so many words outside of our experience, the word “leprosy” does not produce much of a reaction. We know it is a disease, but we do not think too much about how disfiguring it is. There was no cure for leprosy in Jesus’ day. People with leprosy often lost fingers and toes, and even limbs. Their faces became twisted. But perhaps even worse than this was the humiliation and loneliness. They were forced to leave everyone they loved, and to keep them away by continually shouting out society’s judgement on them and their condition: unclean!

In Luke 5, a man “covered with leprosy” comes and falls “with his face to the ground” before Jesus. It is a gesture of reverence; perhaps it is also one of shame. He is unclean. By Old Testament law, his disease is an outward sign of sin and separation. How dare this man approach anyone! Yet what happens next is amazing. Jesus *touches* the man. Can you imagine what that must have meant to him? He is untouchable. He is pushed beyond the margins of society into isolation. He is not someone that anybody touched. Nobody would dare.

But Jesus dared. Jesus touches him. And by touching Him, Jesus restores his humanity and his dignity; He touches the man in love. Jesus

does not need to do that. Many people are healed throughout the Gospels by the power of Jesus’ Word alone. Jesus knew that this man needed more –he needed mercy and love.

Jesus’ mercy triumphs over the judgement of His day. It relieves suffering. It restores dignity. It is full of love and compassion. In Hebrews 2, it says that Jesus became human, like us in almost every way, so He could show us mercy on the cross and in our lives. Praise God for His humanity! Praise Him for His mercy!

As deacons, we are called to live as examples of Jesus Christ –to reach out in love as Jesus did. We are also called to *teach* mercy. Mercy, though, is not something that can simply be taught. Mercy must be shown. If our hearts are full of love for God, and we know deep in our hearts the mercy we have been shown through Jesus, we will want to show mercy to those around us. Then, where there is injustice, we will work for justice. Where there is need, we will respond in love.

Perhaps you do not feel that you are there yet. Perhaps there are times when judgement triumphs over mercy in your life. Or you do not feel like loving your neighbour, let alone showing her mercy. Don’t worry. Offer your weakness to God in prayer. For God uses us as we are, even as He is molding us into something better. Pray that through the power of the Holy Spirit, He will impress on your heart God’s mercy. With Jesus’ example before you, His love in your heart, and a prayer on your lips, you will begin to show mercy, teaching those around you that mercy does indeed “triumph over judgement.”

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Devotions for Deacons

"Prompt Us to Seize New Opportunities to Worship God with Offerings of Wealth, Time, and Ability"

Title:

Scripture:

John 12:1-8

Text:

Romans 12:1

What do you think it would be like to be close to Jesus? What would it be like to eat dinner with Him? Talk with Him? Laugh with Him? Worship at His feet?

Mary, Martha and Lazarus know. They are close to Jesus. They are His friends. They eat with Him and talk with Him. They worship Him. All 3 of them, in their own way, offer Jesus who they are and what they have: Martha, always practical, chooses her worship in serving Jesus dinner, offering her gift of hospitality. Lazarus sits by Jesus, offering himself, his gratitude and friendship. And then there is Mary. Mary disregards expense and extravagantly pours the finest perfume on Jesus. Mary ignores what is proper to unbind her hair and wipe her offering from Jesus' feet like a servant. Hers is an act of beauty, no more genuine than her siblings, but still a moment of worship and adoration.

It is a powerful and holy moment, the beauty of it broken, though, by Judas' objection. If we could just get past Judas' coming betrayal, we might admit that Judas *does* bring up a good point. Surely giving to the poor is more important than spending money on expensive perfume. But Jesus knows Judas' heart. He calls his motivations into question. To give to the poor is important, but Jesus wants us to make it our worship, to do it from our hearts. This is something Judas, with a heart full of greed, did not understand. Serving begins in

worship first. Our "true and proper worship" is to offer our bodies "as living sacrifices" in obedient service.

Though we need to have a heart like Mary's and allow our service to flow out of our worship, we are not all *like* Mary. Some of us are like Martha, serving in practical ways as we have been blessed. Some of us give our time, like Lazarus. Most of us give at least some of our wealth. Probably we are a little like all three. No matter how we serve or what we give, we must understand that God wants our service and our giving to flow out of worship. Once we truly understand God's mercy in Jesus, we will want to offer everything we are and everything we have. As deacons, then, we will be able to "prompt" or lead the congregation in giving when we make clear the deep and profound connection to worship.

For many churches, an offering is part of the order of worship. But is it truly part of worship? Is there a clear connection between giving and the Word of God? Is there a connection between the offering at church and offering the rest of life? Does your congregation understand that it is not just about "ten percent," but about our time and ability too? Worship, like giving, is all of life—it is a lifestyle. As a deacon, you know that only the Holy Spirit will change hearts. But *you* can continue to challenge the congregation with new ways of worshipful giving. Ask God to open your eyes to those opportunities today.

“No matter how we serve or what we give, we must understand that God wants our service and our giving to flow out of worship.”



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Devotions for Deacons

Title: Minister to Rich and Poor Alike

Scripture: Mark 10:17-22

Text: Galatians 6:9-10a

“So, deacons,
“do good to
all people”
(Gal. 6:10a).
Minister to
everyone as
Jesus did.”

Crowds follow Jesus wherever He goes. They want something from Him. Most of the time, they are desperate for a miracle. The rich young man (or “ruler,” as other Gospels call him) is no exception. Despite the dignity of his position, this man, in his desperation, runs after Jesus. Despite who he is, this man falls on his knees before Jesus. But he is looking for a different kind of miracle. He is not ill, not in any way that he can see. He needs to learn from Jesus. He desperately wants to know how to have eternal life.

The rich young man misses the mark immediately. If Jesus is no more than a “good teacher” to him, Jesus’ words will not produce the miracle for which the young man is looking. Jesus gently prompts him: “No one is good –except God alone.” But the man does not figure it out. He does not recognize Jesus for who He is. If Jesus is simply a teacher, the man believes that Jesus can teach him the thing he must *do* to be saved. Jesus shows him how impossible that is by asking him to give away everything he owns. If the rich young man would only believe Jesus is God, however, his focus would immediately change. He would have faith; his heart would be engaged. He would be on his knees in gratitude, and would respond by giving back to God in thanksgiving.

Jesus would not have needed to tell him to give to the poor.

This man is not a disciple. He is not on the margins of society. He is not poor. He does not seem to have an obvious need. And yet his need is greater in many ways. It is easy to judge his spiritual blindness. How could he miss the truth when it is right in front of him? But of course you notice Jesus’ response. Jesus looks at him and loves him. He simply loves him. How beautiful. How hopeful. And what a lesson for us.

Benevolence is kindness. As deacons, we normally associate that word with the offering. And the money in the benevolent fund often goes to the poor. But Jesus, in this story, enlarges our definition of benevolence. This story is not as much about giving to the poor. This story is about the heart. Jesus loves the rich young man and He wants him to love God back.

So, deacons, “do good to all people” (Gal. 6:10a). Minister to everyone as Jesus did. Do not judge. Do not discriminate. Minister to those in the church. Minister to your neighbours. To the poor and to the rich. Show kindness. Meet their needs.

And love them.

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Devotions for Deacons

Weigh the Needs of Causes and

Title: Use the Church's Resources Discerningly

Scripture: John 4:4-42

Text: Philippians 1:9-11

“Paul is clear: Discernment requires love that is full of knowledge and insight.”

The woman comes to the well in the middle of the day. Everyone else is at home, possibly asleep in the noontime heat. Perhaps she is hoping to avoid prying questions and staring eyes: her life is far from perfect and she knows it. But there is a Jew by the well. A Jew! How can this be? What could he be doing here? She wants to avoid him. But then he speaks. And her amazement grows.

In John's Gospel, we read that Jesus is travelling from Galilee to Jerusalem. Normally Jews took a longer route just to avoid Samaria. Jesus even instructs His disciples to stay out of Samaritan towns and, like Him, focus their ministry on the Jews (Matthew 10, 15).

You see, the Jews of Jesus' day discriminated against Samaritans, a mixed blood people outside of God's chosen nation. But Jesus undermines this attitude by commending Samaritans in His stories and encounters with them (see Luke 10, 17). This encounter with the Samaritan woman, however, goes deeper.

This time, Jesus travels through Samaria, and, with perfect discernment, stops at a well. He then begins a conversation with the woman there that marks Him as different from other Jews and that has eternal significance for her.

Jesus asks the woman for a drink. He knows exactly how she will react. Why would a Jew expect kindness from a Samaritan? This conversation, however, is meant to go further: Jesus uses the physical water in the well as an

entry point into a conversation about her need for a Saviour.

Again, with perfect discernment, Jesus turns the conversation to the woman's husband. He states the facts; he does not condemn her. The point is not her 5 husbands, nor to talk about places of worship. He is leading her to the point in the conversation where He will make a startling and bold assertion of who He is. What a gift to this woman! And it leads to amazing professions from many others. Not even the disciples had called Him the "Saviour of the world."

This entire encounter with the Samaritan woman is a beautiful glimpse into Jesus' perfect discernment. He chooses to leave the familiar path and the careful focus of His ministry. Of course He knows hearts, minds, thoughts and actions in advance. But He still makes a bold and unprecedented choice to minister to the needs of this Samaritan town.

As deacons, we are to model Jesus' discernment: to weigh needs, to make bold choices and to put to use the church's resources. Jesus did not always take the familiar route, or do what had always been done. We are called to be like Jesus. But how do we discern? Paul, in Philippians, is clear: Discernment requires love that is full of knowledge and insight. Read God's Word together. Pray for discernment and love. And then make choices boldly, guided by power of the Holy Spirit.



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Devotions for Deacons

Title: Be Compassionate to the Needy

Scripture: Matthew 15:29-38

Text: Colossians 3:12

“ This world is not as it should be. No-one should be hurting or sick or hungry. And Jesus knew that. In fact, that is why He came to earth. ”

The crowds are not just coming to see Jesus; they are not coming just to hear Him preach. They probably do not know He is the Messiah; maybe they do not care. They *do* care, however, that He can heal. They have heard the stories. They have seen the evidence. So they come with their illnesses, looking for a cure. But is it for this that Jesus came? Is not His ministry about telling people to “repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is near” (Matthew 4:17)? But here, He does not talk about the Kingdom of Heaven. He sits up on this mountainside, where everyone has access to Him, and He *shows* them the better way. He heals those who come to Him. Rich and poor alike. Those who believe He is the Messiah, and those who do not.

For 3 days, He heals the crowds. 3 days surrounded by 4000 needy people. It must have been exhausting for Jesus. But what would it have been like to be healed by Jesus? Can you imagine waiting for your turn, surrounded by the crippled now walking and the blind now seeing? Can you imagine the hope in your heart? And when you finally got your turn, would He speak to you? Look deep in your eyes? Lay His hands on you? Would you feel His power? Would you know the truth of who He was?

The Gospels do not give details, but it must have been amazing on the mountainside. What is also amazing is that, once healed, the people do not leave. They got what they came for, but they stay anyways. In fact, 4000 people stay for 3 days. They do not have food to eat; they have not come

prepared. But perhaps because of joy and in spontaneous worship, they stay. Jesus must have been exhausted, but He does not send them away. His compassion goes deeper yet. He knows they are hungry (He is too!) and will not have the strength to go home. And so He feeds them in a miraculous way. He meet all of their physical needs because of His great love and compassion.

Compassion means to “suffer with.” It is a state of the heart. It is deep concern for others. But it comes out of shared experience. Jesus’ compassion is deeply rooted in His humanity. He suffered with us. In the Bible, compassion and mercy are often linked to justice. In order to suffer with someone, you must also understand that all relationships are distorted and broken. This world is not as it should be. No-one should be hurting or sick or hungry. And Jesus knew that. In fact, that is why He came to earth. He knew humanity’s ultimate need. Until He would fill that need for reconciliation with God, Jesus would spend time filling other needs that resulted from the broken world He had entered.

Deacons, we have been called to be compassionate. We must suffer with those around us. To do that, we must understand that we are all the same. We all suffer in an imperfect and sinful world. We are all equally in need of a Saviour. So thank the Father for His love in Jesus. Pray that the Holy Spirit will move your heart. And ask Jesus to “clothe you” in His compassion.

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Devotions for Deacons

Title: Respect Their Need for Dignity

Scripture: Mark 5:24-34

Text: Galatians 3:28

“Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can see as Jesus sees. Ask for that power; pray for that kind of vision.”

There was no health insurance in Galilee. So any illness would be expensive. But 12 years of suffering is enough to put this woman into poverty. For 12 long years, she has suffered “a great deal.” Physically, but probably also emotionally. She lives in a society governed by Pharisees. According to Old Testament law, any bleeding makes her unclean. An unclean and impoverished woman is truly on the margins of society.

In the crowd around Jesus, she is also a faceless woman –unnamed and unnoticed. The crowds press in on every side. In the swelling confusion, the woman sees her chance. She sees a chance to be released from her suffering. She knows, somehow, that power resides in Jesus and she only needs to touch Him. In this crowd, she believes that she could claim that healing without anybody noticing.

If only she can get close enough! But does she dare touch Him? Is she ashamed? Does she think that someone like Jesus would turn away, disgusted? What will happen when this “unclean” woman touches the One who is perfectly clean? But she knows that Jesus has the power to heal her. She knows she must touch Him.

Anonymous, she pushes her way through the crowds to Jesus’ side. With trembling fingers and a believing heart, this woman, unjustly rejected by society, reaches out.

She reaches out and is immediately healed. She reaches out to reclaim what is hers: deliverance and freedom! But also, and just as importantly, she takes back her value as a person, her place as part of these people. If only she knew that she had always had value as a child of God.

That moment of restoration must have made her heart pound. What does she think as Jesus searches for her in the crowd? Can you hear the love in Jesus’ voice when He finds her? “Daughter!” The only person in the Gospels that Jesus addresses this way. She is His precious child! How amazing! He is not angry with her. He does not call her out in front of the crowds. He names her His daughter. He restores her body and her spirit. He gives her peace and dignity.

If only we could have eyes like Jesus. Eyes that see equally and without prejudice. Eyes that look beneath and see each person only as a daughter of Jesus, a precious and unique person –no matter what colour of skin, what circumstance, what life choices. For we “are all one in Christ.” Deacons, we must respect the dignity of each person we serve and love. It will come through in our words. It will come through in how we respond to the needy –to see the person and not just the need. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we will see as Jesus sees. Ask for that power; pray for that kind of vision.



"Live as examples of Christ Jesus"

Devotions for Deacons

Encourage Them with Words

Title: that Create Hope in Their Hearts

Scripture: John 21:15-19

Text: Romans 15:1-6

“ But be still.
Wait for the
Spirit to
prompt you.
Pray together.
Listen in love.
And then
speak what
you are
given. ”

Peter has denied his Lord, the One he so fiercely loves. He has failed Him. So what should he do now? Should Peter try again?

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus calls the disciples away from their nets. From that time on, Jesus says they will “fish for people.” (Luke 5:10). They have a new calling. Yet after Jesus’ death, after Peter’s failure to stand up for His Lord, Peter goes fishing. Maybe he needs a career change. Being a disciple has not gone so well. Maybe he has no idea what to do. Where does he stand with Jesus?

So Peter goes fishing. That night, out on the lake, Peter and the others catch nothing. Experienced fishermen, yet nothing to show for a night’s work. Not one fish. Not until Jesus comes in the morning, that is. In the middle of another failure, Jesus appears. Jesus tells them that they are fishing on the wrong side of the boat. Absurd, really. Fish *do* swim. Why should one side of the boat make a difference? Yet they listen. Jesus’ instruction gives them hope. Because of Jesus, they catch a net full of fish. And at that moment they know it is Jesus.

Peter immediately jumps out of the boat. There is no walking on the water this time. Peter swims, impatient to reach His Lord. It is also eager Peter that drags the 153 fish off the boat when Jesus asks for some of their fish. Why *those* fish? Jesus already

has fish cooking on the coals. But, like casting a net on the other side of the boat, perhaps it is more about obedience.

When Jesus finally speaks to Peter, He does not use the name He gave to him. He calls him “Simon,” the name he was given at birth. Mirroring the 3 times that Peter denied Jesus, Jesus asks if Peter loves Him. At the end of the third time, Jesus calls Peter again, just as He did at the beginning of His ministry: “Follow me.”

Peter’s joy must have been as spontaneous as jumping out of the boat or walking on the water. What Jesus’ words must have meant to him! Jesus has spoken the words of love and healing. There can be no mistake that Jesus’ words are intentionally chosen. He starts over with Peter; He gives him hope and purpose once more.

Words are important and have immense power. They can encourage and bring hope. But they can also hurt. As Deacons, our words are important. Romans 15 reminds us that we must build each other up. We must use Jesus’ example “to teach us” and use encouragement from the Scriptures to give hope. We are not all good with words. We often do not know what to say in response to hurt and heartache. But be still. Wait for the Spirit to prompt you. Pray together. Listen in love. And then speak what you are given.



"Live as examples of Christ Jesus"

Devotions for Deacons

Encourage Them with Deeds
that Bring Joy into Their Lives

Title:

Mark 10:13-16

Scripture:

Text:

Matthew 5:16

“You are the light of the world. So let that light shine! Through your good deeds, glorify God. And bring joy into the lives around you.”

Imagine the scene. Jesus is teaching the people. He speaks with authority and they are listening to every word. Soon, Pharisees come up—teachers of the people, with authority of their own. Can you imagine them cutting through the crowds? People part to let them pass. *They* are the religious leaders. Who is this man, then, and with what authority does he teach? Their very steps must show their determination and indignation as they approach.

Does Jesus stop teaching as they come? He knows why they are there. He knows their heart, and the hate that consumes them. The Pharisees ask Jesus a hostile question, meant to test Him. Jesus answers perfectly, and the Pharisees go away, presumably dissatisfied. You can almost hear the murmurs of the crowd. The air must have been full of tension. Yet Jesus and the disciples go into a nearby house to talk further about what had happened.

The crowd, though, is not yet ready to leave. They have just witnessed Jesus disarm the Pharisees, and, with boldness, proclaim the truth. They must have been amazed. They immediately wanted some of His power for themselves. Surely this is also a man with authority to bless. If only He would notice their children. So they bring them to Jesus. The disciples, however, are not quite finished with their discussion.

They tell the people to leave them alone. But Jesus will have none of it. He tells them that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to little children. How that must have confused the disciples. Little children? But their serious discussions must surely be more important. Yet Jesus stops in the middle of these discussions to open up His arms. He takes the children on His lap. He holds them. He blesses them.

Can you imagine the joy for the parents of those children? Their children are blessed and loved by Jesus—these little ones, perhaps running, skipping and laughing, oblivious to the tension and discussions around them. What an amazing thing that Jesus stops to delight in little children!

It is easy, as deacons, for us to be swept up in the administrative details. There are important ministry tasks to do. There is money to count and distribute. There is another meeting next week. There are causes to look into.

Stop.

In the middle of it all, stop and go visit a widow. Talk to the person standing alone after church. Give a hug. Write a note of encouragement. You are the light of the world. So let that light shine! Through your good deeds, glorify God. And bring joy into the lives around you.



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Devotions for Deacons

Be Prophetic Critics of the Waste,

Title: Injustice and Selfishness in our Society

Scripture: John 2:12-17

Text: Isaiah 42:1-4

“Pray also that you will be filled with courage to overturn tables when you need to.”

This story creates quite a dramatic scene. It is the Sabbath day and the town is emptying into the temple courts. But on this Sabbath, there is more noise, more busyness than usual. People are coming from outside Jerusalem for the Passover. Many do not bring the animals needed for the sacrifice. What better place to buy those animals than right here in the temple courts. Feathers are flying as doves are sold. Sheep are bleating. People step around the cows. For the religious leaders, the most joyful noise, though, is the clinking of coins as money changes hands. They are cashing in on the crowds with their temple market.

Can you imagine Jesus' face as He enters the temple courts? If people recognize authority in His quiet teaching, they must have trembled before His righteous anger. He makes a whip and drives out the animals. He swipes the money from the tables and on to the ground. And then he overturns the tables too. Did the money changers dare to dive after their coins, scattered in the mud? Imagine the confusion! What is going on here?

While Jesus' anger is most certainly about what has been done to God's holy temple, Jesus' actions are also a direct challenge to the religious leaders, who are the spiritual and local civil authority. By overruling them on their own "turf," Jesus is making a powerful statement about their leadership

and the way they govern. Jesus directly challenges their economic exploitation of people, and their social discrimination. Through His ministry, Jesus has shown a completely different way of doing things, of being a society. Every part of Jesus' ministry proclaims this new way: Listen to His words. Watch how He compassionately heals everyone regardless of race, belief, or lifestyle. Feel the powerful expressions of His love. But even while Jesus lives this new way, He also goes right to the source of the problem, the root of the inequity. He does not just "turn the tables" on the religious leaders, He *overturns* the tables. He turns everything upside down.

Deacons, we are called to be critical of waste, selfishness and injustice around us. And our response may take many forms. Often it will be about demonstrating a better way. But it is also important to understand what is going on around you. Not just to see poverty and provide relief, but to try to understand why there is poverty. Jesus brought a powerful and beautiful picture of His Kingdom. But at the same time, He got to the heart of the issue, speaking out against the source of the injustice. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you wisdom to bring relief where it is needed, to learn in humility Jesus' better way, and to live out and proclaim justice. Pray also that you will be filled with courage to overturn tables when you need to.

"Live as examples of Christ Jesus"

Devotions for Deacons

Be Sensitive Counselors to the

Title: Victims of Waste, Injustice and Selfishness

Scripture: John 8: 1-11

Text: Philippians 2:3-5

Jesus is in the temple courts once more. He is redeeming the space after clearing it of corruption. He is teaching about the Kingdom, but He is again interrupted by the teachers of the law. Again, they cut through the crowds. This is their space and they are ready to reclaim it. This time, they have the perfect plan. They drag their victim before Jesus, bruising her arm in their self-righteous grip. Finally they have a trap that is not just theoretical. This trap is flesh and blood. Here is a woman caught in violation of the law. This is their area of expertise and they are smug in their certain victory. They know Jesus has even eaten with prostitutes. So, if He convicts her, He condemns Himself with His hypocrisy. If He does not convict her, He is an enemy of the law. There is no way out for Him this time!

The teachers of the law do not care about the woman, of course. She is a victim of their selfishness. They do not need her to be physically present in order to question and trap Jesus. Her humiliation adds to their victory. They also do not care about justice. They have caught this woman committing adultery with a man, but they do not drag the man in front of Jesus. According to the Law of Moses, both should be stoned (see Leviticus 20). They care about themselves, their smug self-righteousness, and making themselves look good by discrediting Jesus.

"Now what do you say?" they demand. But Jesus does not answer them. In fact, He ignores the question altogether. It is not a question of condemning or absolving the woman. It is not about the issue of adultery at all. The teachers of the law really want to accuse Jesus. So Jesus turns the tables on them. He makes them accuse themselves. They cannot say they are without sin. Their legalism condemns them. So they leave one by one. Until Jesus is left with the woman.

What does He have to say to her? He is the only one perfectly justified in throwing the "first stone" at her. But He does not. He does not accuse her, but tells her to go and leave her life of sin. Amazing! Jesus *does* insist on repentance but He goes straight for the root of the injustice against the woman, silences her accusers, and restores her.

So many people are judged. So many are mistreated. And so many are on the margins. As deacons, we must work for justice. This is Kingdom-building work. But it is not about homelessness or poverty, or disabilities or racial discrimination. If all you see are issues, you will never see the face of the people behind those issues. Do not give your neighbours a label; do not make assumptions about them. Get to know them, not only their situation or need. Love the person, build a relationship and leave all the judgemental stones on the ground where Jesus left them.

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