

Advent Brookland: Palm Sunday

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Preacher: Bishop Steve Breedlove

[0 : 00] Please pray with me.

Lord God, again, we thank you for this day that you've given us to worship you. And Lord, it is a privilege and an honor to be able to come into the presence of the living God in order to bring worship, the sacrifice of praise.

Lord, thank you that the children have led us today. And we thank you for our children. And the blessing that they are upon us. Lord, we ask you to please pour your spirit out upon us as a church so that this morning the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts may be acceptable in eyesight.

Oh, Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Through Jesus we pray. Amen. I want to say good morning again to you. A lot of you were out when I had a chance to greet you.

My name is Steve Breedlove. And I am the bishop of the Diocese of Christ, our hope. And it's a joy to be with you. It is always a joy to come to this church. I got to tell you that I love this church.

[1 : 06] It's very, very special to me. Now, as soon as you get real proud, just realize I say that every week to a different church. But I do mean it. I do mean it. It is a delight to be here.

And it is a delight to see the growth of this church. I think I met six or seven new people today who were under the age of five months. And so there is a lot of growth.

You know, Palm Sunday in an Anglican church has always been a challenge from a liturgical point of view simply because there's this massive 90-degree turn that you have to take when you're going full speed in the service.

You know, you take a 90-degree turn without even slowing down. You begin with the joy of all the children coming in and waving the palms and singing Hosanna and shouting to the Lord. And it's a recapitulation of the original events of First Palm Sunday.

And usually there's a Palm Sunday reading from the Gospels, which we did this morning, and some celebratory singing as well. And then somewhere in here there's a sermon, but also somewhere in here there's this, as I said, this hard turn, 90-degree turn, when you read a different scripture, which again, Tommy just read for us, which shifts the entire theme of the service from Palm Sunday to Passion Week.

[2 : 24] And so wherever that happens in terms of the service itself, because it can happen different places, we turn from shouting Hosanna to the King to the dark theme of rejection that leads to Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

So we're bringing together in one service, every Palm Sunday, all of these different themes. So to make it more interesting, Tommy has asked that we also add an ordination on top of that, right?

So we overlay on top of all of that a service that has been given to us by the Anglican Church in North America, by which we ordain a deacon. I'm just saying, lots of moving parts.

I don't know what your family life was like when you were growing up, or maybe even now, but we have five kids, and they're all married. And whenever we get around for a dinner table conversation, there's 12 adults and usually four or five other kids pile in there because we do have 12 grandkids so far.

And rarely do we ever have one conversation going on at the same time, right? We have about three or four conversations going on. And every once in a while, we may unite around one particular theme, but that's unusual.

[3 : 33] But the wonderful truth I want to say to you, even as I've mentioned the cross currents of this service today, when we have Palm Sunday and we have Passion Week and we have now an ordination on top of it, there is, let me just stop here, there is one clear underlying theme that ties it all together, a current that runs through all aspects of what we're doing here today.

And that theme is expressed in the last statement that Tommy just read to us from the lips of Jesus, from Luke chapter 22. I am among you as one who serves.

You know, Jesus' life was stamped by a call to servanthood. The template of his life, and he understood this well, came out of the Old Testament. He was the fulfillment of all of the prophetic pictures of the Old Testament so that we, as we scroll ahead in our minds, we remember Luke 24 when he opened the scriptures and explained to the disciples on the road to Emmaus from cover to cover, basically, how the entire scriptures point to him.

So he was soaked in those prophetic words, those prophetic pictures of which he is the fulfillment. And I cannot help but think, as he was walking into this last week of his life, that he was thinking of Isaiah chapter 49.

Listen to this prophetic picture. And now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, key word, and to bring Jacob back to him, that Israel might be gathered to him, for I'm honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength.

[5 : 11] He says to me, and this is Jesus speaking prophetically, it is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved Israel.

I will make you a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

Phenomenal declaration. You're going to be my servant to bring the whole world back to me.

Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and His Holy One, to the one despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of the king, the servant of rulers.

So do you see, even in the declaration of the great work of Jesus Christ, there is this not only call to servanthood, but this call to walk a path of rejection.

Why did Jesus ride on the back of a donkey from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem? I am among you as one who serves.

[6 : 16] Why did He receive the hosannas knowing full well the fickle hearts of the crowd? I am among you as one who serves. Why did Jesus wash the disciples' feet on Maundy Thursday?

I am among you as one who serves. Why did He bow the knee to the Father in the garden? Why did He say, not my will, but thine be done? You can quote it with me now.

I am among you as one who serves. Why is Amy being ordained today? She will be among you as one who serves. The Lord is at work in our diocese to stir up an awareness of the vocational calling of all followers of Jesus Christ.

We made a strong statement about that last summer. We wrote three papers on ministry and ordination. And the first of those papers was entitled, The Foundational Vision of the Ministry of All the Saints.

And we stated firmly, and I trust very clearly, that every Christian is called to the vocation of ministry, whether or not it be as a bishop or a priest or a deacon or as a layperson.

[7 : 25] That's really rooted in Ephesians chapter 2.10, one of my very favorite verses in Scripture. And I want you to understand this and remember this. In Ephesians 2.10, God declares to us, for you are His workmanship, God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus, His handiwork created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

And there's this tremendous picture of the fact that all of us are hardwired to do something that is good for the sake of God's kingdom. And God has woven together our temperament and our gifts and our stories and our past in order that we might make a beautiful impact.

It is a wonderful thing to have a vocation, not just a job, but a calling, a vocation that identifies what we do with who we are and what we are to be.

In January, I confirmed 16 adults at Church of the Ascension in Arlington. It was really a joy to meet with them one-on-one beforehand and hear them all articulate a sense of a vocation, a purpose from God.

And I would ask them, what are you hoping to do? I'm going to lay hands on you and pray for you and pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit and pray for gifts in your life, for renewed gifts and expanded gifts. What are you praying for?

[8 : 43] I remember one man who said, I have a nine-to-five job, but my real calling is to disciple my four daughters. But more than that, he said, Bishop Steve, I really want to teach other men the power of being a father to disciple their children.

And I want to develop a ministry within our own church where I mentor other men as disciple makers of their children. Wow, that's a calling. Another woman said to me, a young woman said to

me, I'm a violin teacher.

I've been trying to be a really, really great teacher. But you know what, Steve, frankly, he said, I haven't really liked the kids I've been teaching very much. They annoy me because they don't do a good job.

And so she said, I realized through this whole process that I'm actually called to a much deeper calling than teaching them how to play violin. I'm called to love them and teach them the beauty of music as a reflection of God, as who God is.

Would you pray for me? And Pastor Dean Miller has done a great job of discipling people around this idea that we all have a vocation or calling. Well, what does that have to do with this morning? [9:47] Well, Amy, I'm going to talk to you right now. You're called to the vocation of being a deacon. Now, you will have details about what that means in your life, and we'll talk about that in a few minutes. According to your own background and your own calling and your own gifting, you have good works to do.

But underneath it, you play a particular role within the orders of lay, deacon, priest, and bishop in order to root us all into your identity as a deacon, which is another word translated as servant. So servanthood is to dominate you in all you do. Every vocation is a service, right? Every vocation is beautiful and unique.

But the vocation of a deacon, the very name that you bear, is to model servanthood in all you do to remind all of us how we are to operate.

I want to give you four instructions specifically to you, and I hope the rest of you will pick up some information along the way. Out of the life of Philip, we don't know a lot about many of the deacons in the New Testament.

[10:59] But of all the deacons in the New Testament, we know more about Philip than anyone else. And we've already met him in that passage from Acts chapter 6, because he's one of the first deacons that was chosen when the church began to recognize the office of the deacon.

And so I want to state for you four principles for your life and ministry out of the life of Philip. The first is what I've already said. I'm going to emphasize it, expand it.

A deacon's call is a call to humble service and therefore to define all of our ministries for us. Philip, as we're going to see in a few minutes, was a highly gifted man, but his first job was what?

To wait on tables. It is what many people call menial service. Well, that's an okay term because it's based out of an old French word which means hand service, using your hands for the sake of others.

And that's a beautiful picture. Maundy Thursday, Jesus, you know, we're going to celebrate and remember that Jesus used his hands to do what? Wash the disciples' feet. So show me a deacon or a priest or a bishop or a layperson who refuses to clear the table or wash the dishes or sweep the floor or change the diapers or clean up the vomit, and I'll show you somebody that God's not going to use very much.

[12:18] Because inevitably, God has called us all to exemplify Jesus by our hand service. One of the most influential pastors in my generation, and maybe somebody that not a whole lot of you are aware of, but in my generation was this guy named Eugene Peterson.

And he wrote many, many books on pastoral ministry. And he was a great influencer of our entire generation. He's still alive about what it meant to be a good pastor. And in one of his candid moments, Eugene Peterson commented that pastoral ministry was little more than shoveling sheep stuff.

But he used another S word. Those were his words, not mine. But he's basically saying that all of us are called to common labor for the sake of others.

Philip did not balk at menial service. He waited on tables. Luke 22, today's gospel reading comes from the upper room. After the Lord's Supper, when Jesus had already washed the disciples' feet, and he reminds them a disciple is not above his master.

And I've given you an example for you to follow. Later on that evening, as we heard in the text, they started arguing about which of them was the greatest. Go figure. Was that because they were just sheer idiots?

[13:36] I mean, you know, what's going on here? Were they, you know, were they suffering from group dementia? Well, I'm wondering if they were thinking, well, if washing feet is my call, then I think it's pretty significant that Jesus washed my feet before he washed yours.

You know, something like that. My tendency is just to think that they are very, very normal people who learn life-changing lessons at 6.40 p.m., and by 9, what, 17 p.m., they forgot them, especially after four cups of wine, right?

It was a Passover feast. But Jesus makes his point in a phrase that I hope that we really remember, in fact, that we've memorized by the time we're done this morning, I am among you as one who serves.

You're not supposed to act like this. And, Amy, I know that you were already living in exemplary fashion as a servant. Within the body, I know what you do. I know how your heart is for other people in the church, particularly how you've ministered in so many different ways to women and to those who are being taught and disciplined.

So I encourage you to continue to keep up the service of a servant. The second thing I want to say to you out of Philip's life is that the Diaconate is a calling to true Christian spirituality.

[15:01] Again, we're going to talk in a minute about Philip's gifts, but he was not chosen because of his giftedness. That's not the basis of his choice. It says clearly that the reason that he was chosen is because he had a good reputation, he was full of the Holy Spirit, and he was full of wisdom.

In other words, because of his love for the Lord, his dependence, his prayer life, his study of Scripture, and his own determination to bow the knees to the Lord in his own life.

In a phrase, he was a faithful, obedient man. He was a holy man. How important is it? I've been reading Exodus in my own personal devotions lately, and a couple weeks ago I was in Exodus chapter 4.

And if you read through that, it summarizes in the first three chapters all of the preparation and qualities of Moses' life, all of his capacities.

And you read about the miracle of him being saved out of the Nile, and you read about how he was taken to Pharaoh's house, and he was raised, and all of the education of Egypt, and he learned Egyptian, and he learned all those skills.

[16:08] And then you know, of course, about what happened when he was 40 years old, when he blew it, and he had to leave for fear of his life. He went into exile in Midian. He became a shepherd. He spent 40 years in the desert learning how to lead flocks of sheep.

That was going to serve him in good stead. All these things that God was using to prepare him. At age 80, he has the burning bush, this incredible encounter with God, in which he gets his commission.

So he decides that he's going to go back at the command of God to do what God's told him to do, to set Israel free, to lead them out of bondage in Egypt. And in Exodus chapter 4, he says goodbye to his father-in-law, kind of wraps up things back in Midian, and he's on his way back to Egypt.

And then we run into this very strange event in Exodus chapter 4. Verse 24, At a lodging place on the way, the Lord met him and sought to put him to death.

Then Zipporah, that's his wife, took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it and said, Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me.

[17:15] So he let him alone. It was then that she said a bridegroom of blood because of the circumcision. What in the world is this about? I mean, if you're reading through Exodus, surely you've got to stop there and go, what is going on?

Well, it's about personal holiness. It's about obedience. Moses had been deeply prepared for the job that God had called him to do, but he was also simply part of the people of God.

And the people of Israel didn't know a whole lot at this time. They were kind of early in their days. But they knew that Abraham was their father, and they knew from Abraham that God had called this nation to be a blessing to the world and that God was going to use them to bring salvation to the world.

Abraham was the father of the chosen people of God to bring this blessing about. But as he received this calling, he also received a sign of the covenant with God, a sign that he and his family were set apart, and the sign was the simple act of circumcision.

That has a whole lot of symbolic meanings. And you can kind of dig into that and figure out what that's about. But it was also just simply an act of obedience. And you didn't even have to understand it.

[18:27] You just had to do it, right? You had to do the right thing. But Moses had not thought that step of obedience mattered. He hadn't gotten around to it with his own kids.

So God, he's on the way to Egypt to do his job that God had called you to do, and God stops him in his tracks. And basically what God is saying is your personal obedience and your holiness is critical. It's life-changingly critical. You can't take another step in service without clearing this up. So Amy, you've got to take this personally. Your obedience, your life of godliness, your true spirituality must be profound and deep.

And it must be consistent in every way possible. And you must show us all the importance of a life of holiness. So you embody servanthood to us.

You embody obedience and holiness. The third principle from the life of Philip is that a deacon is called to gifted service. And therefore, a deacon defines the method by which the ministry progresses for everybody within the church of God, as we personally fulfill our gifts.

[19 : 40] It goes back to the Ephesians 2 passage I've already mentioned about you're created in Christ Jesus for good works. So let's talk about Philip. Philip, one of the first cohort of deacons, was chosen to do menial service, but to that basic servant ministry, which he never outgrew, we learn a few things.

He was a gifted preacher and evangelist. Immediately after his ordination as a deacon, without further training, after he'd taken care of the table needs, he was out on the streets preaching Christ. He was in the synagogues preaching Christ. Apparently, he was good enough to venture to speak publicly. Now, where did that come from? Philip was a Jew, but his name is Greek, which gives us a hint for the fact that he was raised as a Jew in a Greek-speaking culture.

So he's like Paul or Stephen. Both are, excuse me, all three of them were people who were Jews, but who were raised in a Greek-speaking culture.

In a Greek-speaking culture, he was taught the rhetorical capacities that Greeks taught all of their children.

[20 : 48] But he also, as a Jew, was taught that when you reach your bar mitzvah, you need to be able to stand up in the synagogue and be able to open the scriptures and proclaim the scriptures. Do you see how those gifts converged?

And I think it's very, very interesting that three of the most significant preachers in the New Testament were all from that same setting. Of that convergence of Greek education and Jewish education, Stephen, Paul, and Philip.

He also apparently had enormous gifts and abilities to take risk and cross cultures. Because Philip was the one who opened the door for the evangelization of the Samaritans.

And he was the agent who opened up the entire nation of Ethiopia by sharing the gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch. He was critical to the apostolic expansion of the church.

Where did this come from? Well, again, think about his cross-cultural background. Think about the fact that he lived in a place with duality. Think about the fact that he probably understood what it meant to be a hated minority on both sides of his life.

[21 : 46] Because the Greeks hated him for being a Jew and the Jews hated him for being a Greek-trained Jew. And so he was in both places out of place. He experienced, I'm sure, compassion for the widows who shared his own language.

That's Acts chapter 6. They were outsiders in their Jewish culture. And yet he was sympathetic to them. All of this was woven into his life and his soul.

So that he had the ability to radically expand the gospel into new cultures. Philip, in that process, was given the ability to perform signs and wonders in support of the proclamation of Christ.

And those are not natural abilities. Those are supernatural abilities. At the same time, you've got to wonder what he was like as a dad. Because he had four daughters who were all prophets in the New Testament.

So he must have disciplined them very well. So you see all the gifts that he brought. And he fulfilled those gifts. God had made him who he is. Well, Amy, the point should be clear.

[22 : 52] The Diagonal Office offers incredible opportunity for the exercise of any gift. Evangelism, miracle working, apostolic expansion, teaching, discipling, waiting tables.

And God wants to use you and fill you with his power so that what you do impacts others supernaturally. Years and years ago, when I was a young pastor, I was in a church.

We were cleaning up. It was one of those work days when we were cleaning up the facility. And I was up adjusting a fluorescent bulb up in the ceiling, okay? And I slipped and dropped the bulb on the concrete floor.

Well, you guys, have you ever seen a fluorescent bulb hit the floor? You know, it explodes, okay? And there were a bunch of other people around. And I was embarrassed. And I quickly grabbed, you know, got down, started to get down from the ladder.

But literally before I could get down from the ladder, a guy named Bill, who was a deacon in our church, grabbed a dustpan and a broom. And he came over and said, I want to do this for you.

[23 : 54] And I don't know how to explain this, but there was something about his action and his demeanor that literally pierced my soul. And I've never, ever forgotten it.

That simple act of cleaning up a broken fluorescent bulb literally got into my heart and helped me understand who I am supposed to be in a way that nothing else could have.

And so I'm just going to say to you, Amy, whatever your calling is, according to the gifts that you've been given, God wants you to use you in that gifting for ways that you can only imagine.

So embrace who you're called to be in your gifting. And then my last statement about deacons is the deacons' call is to be a living example and leader of bifocal Christianity.

What do I mean? You're called to leadership. The body of Christ is crying out for good, faithful leaders, and we need leaders. And there are several kinds of leaders who are needed by the body.

[24 : 55] There are shepherds, pastors, and there are bishops who are shepherds of shepherds.

But a shepherd, by definition, stands somewhat apart from the flock. He has to be, by definition, his eyes on the horizon, looking for danger.

His eyes on the flock, making sure everybody is kept together. He's always thinking about and assessing where to get food, where to get water, where to go, what's the movement, where's safety for this flock. And so Tommy, as the shepherd of this flock, is always looking in the big picture.

He has to. That's his job. But diagonal leadership is from within the flock. It's exemplary. It's by force of presence and example.

It's by brushing the shoulders with everyone else, by being among the people. And encouraging the flock to hear the word of the Lord through the shepherd that God has given in order to communicate and help everybody get what we're supposed to do.

But having said that, it's also bifocal. It may sound like a contradiction, but the deacon's call is also to stand with a foot in the church and a foot in the world.

[26 : 04] And therefore, again, to define who the church is meant to be. Because as a church, we gather as a people of God to worship God and to grow. But we also scatter to live into the world.

So every Sunday when you as a deacon proclaim, therefore, you know, go into the world to love and serve the Lord, you're called to embody that in your life and ministry.

Again, we don't have many details about many deacons in the New Testament, but every single deacon we have, Philip, Stephen, Epaphroditus, I believe also Phoebe, every one of these deacons is stated not only to have capacities within the church, but to be either a missionary or a prophetic speaker or a preacher out in the streets.

The tradition of the church is very strong on this. Deacons traditionally have maintained some form of mission in the world and therefore helped the church understand its bifocal vision to stand in both places.

So deacons have led in evangelism, they've led in compassion and mercy ministries, and they've even led in apostolic mission, breaking open new territory. Amy, today is a powerful day of convergence.

[27 : 20] It's Palm Sunday, Passion Week, and your ordination. And to me, the thing that ties them all together is this massive theme of servitude. I'm among you as one who serves, says our Lord.

You are to be exemplary in your service, exemplary in your spirituality, exemplary in your fulfillment of your gifts and calling, exemplary in being a bifocal Christian who lives with a foot in both worlds.

And I pray that this church and our diocese is shaped and grounded in the servanthood of Jesus by Amy Atchison. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.