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Service

My friends and I are here today because of service, as you know. All through both halves of the Bible, we are called to be the servants of God. But what does one of the most important instructions of the Bible actually ask us to do? What is service?

It can mean what we did this week. Splitting wood and giving it to people who'll need it for the winter. Doing siding on the church in Hartford. Back home in Buffalo, service can mean making food and giving it to people. It means helping children in need. Everyone acknowledges these things as service. Today's reading tells us that if we do things like that, we will be rewarded in heaven. Based on the examples, it can be concluded that service means helping people. But, as anyone who's ever been helped, which is all of us, can tell you, those examples are only a few types of service.

Emotional support is also service. If someone's going through a tough time, said person's friends would help him or her along. That's one of the main functions of a community. And it's helping someone when it's needed most, so it's service. Service can also be helping someone handle doubt, also a main function of a church community, and, I believe, why churches are communal. Spiritual support is an integral part of faith for both people, and it's a form of service.

And service doesn't need to have its own whole week or a day set aside. Carrying bags for someone who's struggling. It takes five minutes, and it's service. Even serving those who serve can be service. People who provide transportation, like our advisors and some leaders from here in Maine, who spent a good part of this week driving us around to various work sites. People who provide lodging, such as our hosts, you, the Hartford Community Church. People who provide financial support, whether by setting up fundraisers or by giving to them. Many people from Westminster in Buffalo have to the Maine Share or Allentown Parking fundraisers. That was service when they did that.

Now, doing one act of service in your whole life is not a free pass to heaven. Nothing is. You have to make it a lifestyle. I'm reminded of a quote I see quite often. It's written on a trash can in my hometown, East Aurora. It's from Mother Teresa, who said, "If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one." If you can help someone who's suffering in any way, remember that, though at times, sins of omission can be just as bad as sins of commission, you can't do everything, so you shouldn't have to.

If you see someone who's, say, having car troubles by the side of the road, stop to help them. If you can fix their problem, do it, but even if you can't, you can still serve by flagging down someone who can. Let's say you happen to know someone who's going through a dark patch, have a talk. I know from extensive personal experience on both sides that, in the words of another trash can quote, this one by Elbert Hubbard, a local artisan, you should, "Talk less, listen more," if you're on the receiving end. If you can offer a helpful solution, offer it, but no one would expect you to fix everything, especially if you can't. Just like in the car scenario, find someone who can help instead. All of that is service.

Now, if you apply all this to your life all the time, you'd be living a life of service to others. And our reading tells us that, as we have done that, we've also been living a life of service to God. We will receive a reward in heaven, whatever that means, but that's almost secondary. The point is, you've done what God asks above most else. And, again from experience, including last week, it's a great feeling you get when you serve someone. You've heard it before, but it's true. I like to think the reward God speaks of is that feeling and the satisfaction of having pleased God.

Amen.