**Nu‘uanu Congregational Church**

**October 17, 2021**

**Sermon Notes for “21st Century Servant”**

**Rev. Kyle Lovett**

Scripture: Mark 10:35-45 (CEV, *adapted*)

What a blessing to be with you again today!

When I was a teenager and returned from serving in a medical aid program in the rural areas of Central America, I knew I had to figure out what I was going to do with my life. A few years later, hiking the east side of the Sierras with church youth groups, it finally came clear to me: What better thing could I do than spend my life serving God and God's people?!?

My Mom was in theatre, and I had spent a lot of my younger teenage years backstage – doing make-up, props, sets, costuming. I was pretty clear that I didn’t want to be on stage, but I was quite happy working behind the scenes to help others perform to their highest abilities.

That translated well into a servanthood model that I found in the church. I was raised in the church to be a Helper. I arrived early to potlucks, set up chairs, made sure there were napkins and cups and a clear path for elders to navigate to their seats. I thought that’s what it was to serve others.

Now, so many years and careers later, as a slightly-past-middle-aged adult, like you, I’m faced with it being time to think outside of the box.

The biblical story of James and John has echoes of that as well. They thought they knew what they wanted. They wanted to get ahead. This is not the only New Testament story where “where you sit” is a strong indicator of how important you are. (*There’s a story in Luke 14 of someone who went to a wedding and sat in the front row, only to be told to get up and move because someone more important showed up. Also, find stories in Matthew 19 and Matthew 20 about the first shall be last and the last shall be first.*)

Those of us who have been around Christian churches for a while have probably heard about James and John, and the moral of that story: *If you want to be great, you must be the servant of all the others.*

Like it or not, our world is changing. It’s already changed in countless ways in our lifetimes. Over just the past year and three-quarters, the coronavirus pandemic has caused even more rapid changes.

When I think about a church full of people who get it about servanthood and other-focused care, it’s you all here at Nu‘uanu Congregational Church. From your goodie bags for panhandlers to internship opportunities for young adults, you all have been inspirational to me and to the wider community in your humble service.

Now, if you stop to think about it, what kinds of changes have happened in the ways you serve others? I’m asking not just about the bigger projects you’ve done as a church but also the really small things you’ve done as an individual. Staying home for the health and safety of others and ourselves has caused quite a disruption.

This pandemic has taught many more of us what our kupuna already knew. Isolation can cause debilitating depression, and staying in touch is essential for everyone’s mental health.

You may think, “Hey! I’m stuck at home! I can't serve others at all!”

Well, you may not be able to serve them the way you use to. But maybe instead this is a good opportunity to go back to a very old-fashioned way of taking care of others – by just simply staying in touch. Note cards. Postcards.

(Or you could go a little more high-tech: A phone call. A text. A Zoom video chat.)

Some of us who have been stuck at home during the pandemic really miss that personal human contact. And those of us who have been on the front lines during this pandemic also desperately need to hear from others that they’re thinking of us.

And if you haven’t started your own ministry of notecards, October is a great month to begin! October is mental health awareness month. It's also Pastor appreciation month. Last Sunday was World Mental Health Day. Last Sunday was also the United Church of Christ Access Sunday, focus on transforming the church so that it is accessible to all.  
  
In Hawai‘i, October is also Pride month, a time to affirm and celebrate those in our families, churches, and community who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, māhū, fa’afafine, fakaleiti, Two-Spirit, and same-gender-loving. In some churches that are out about being welcoming, it’s also a month to affirm publicly that the church welcomes the rainbow community into the full life and leadership of the church.  
  
As you might imagine, being the modern-day equivalent of a biblical-era leper is hard on one’s mental health.

As an aside to those who are right now too crushed, too tired...

Just take a deep, centering breath and never mind this call to 21st century servanthood. Take a nap. Do nothing. Do NOT feel guilty. You do NOT have to do anything! Your health and well-being are not dependent on *doing*. Just be. Be still.

Servanthood comes in many, many forms. Serving another person, showing that you care for them, providing a meal, providing housing, providing money, writing a note, providing a casserole, giving an elbow bump and looking directly in the eyes – those are all affirmations that preserve and sustain the humanity of the other person

For those of us who have bandwidth, it’s time to step up our game on modern-day servanthood, using old-fashioned tools. Bottom line, just as James and John discovered, 21st century servanthood is all about relationship.  
  
Let us always remember what one of the biblical creation stories named:

We are all created B’tselem Elohim – in the Divine Image.

That’s you. And me. The servants, and those who are served.

May it be so.

Amen.