

“Doing our Best”

Mark 9:33-37:

And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” But they kept quiet silent for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the Twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”

One of the greatest hymns of the Church is “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name,” and each stanza of that hymn ends with the refrain: “Crown him Lord of all.” Someone has correctly pointed out that, unless we crown Christ “Lord OF all,” we cannot crown Christ Lord AT all. What does this mean? How do we live if God is the Lord of our lives? What are some of the guidelines for using all our resources and opportunities in order to **do OUR best for God**?

It is safe to say that most of us do not hunger and thirst after righteousness nearly as much as God desires. The news we see on television and on our screens, shows us the distorted relationships among people which we experience and observe, and the anxieties that make up so much of our lives all confirm that we’re not **doing our best for God**. It is also true, however, that all of us have times when we’d LIKE to do AND be what God intends. Sometimes we do try to **do our best**; sometimes we do what is good and right and within God’s will. There are cooperative efforts, strengthened relationships, and inward peace and joy that come from those efforts. In light of these observations, then, a sermon on **doing our best**, is neither irrelevant nor silly; it’s important and needed and, in our best moments, wanted.

As Christians who desire **to do our best for God**, we live in RESPONSE to God’s goodness to us. We believe that life has been given to us by God. The Bible begins with, *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth”* (Genesis 1:1).

The psalmist affirms, *“The Earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof, the world, and those who dwell therein”* (Psalm 24:1). God did not create the world and everything in it and then just leave us to ourselves. He provides resources within nature that continue to serve our needs. He gives us intelligence and ingenuity that we can use for advancing the world he gave us to live in. He is intimately involved with us in our daily lives and promises to watch over us. Jesus said: *“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows”* (Matthew 10:29-31).

Most important of all, God gave us his Son so that we, lost in sin and doomed to eternal destruction, might be forgiven and live with him forever. Jesus calls us to **do our best** as servants who put ourselves last.

We Christians are realists who believe that the resources of our lives should be used, not as WE wish, or as OTHER humans might suggest, but in doing the will of the God created the universe and has given us life that is GOOD. In the Bible’s account of Creation, Moses wrote, after each phase of creation, God saw that it was good, and, after all had been completed, God looked on all he had made and saw that *“it was VERY good”* (Genesis 1:31). Through our disobedience, the world that God created “good” is broken and has been filled with sin. We have not been good stewards of the resources God has given us, and we have not put him or others first before ourselves. We have so often neglected his command to continue his mission of seeking and saving the lost. We live in a broken world. We can just give up and spend our time just waiting for our time on earth to be over, or we can **do our best** as we respond to the love of God who certainly **does his best for us!**

A young couple had two children – a girl, ten, and her brother, eight. The children had wanted to go to Disneyworld for a long time. Finally, their parents had saved up enough money so the family could take that long flight and spend three nights and two days at Disneyworld. The children had a GREAT time and, when the vacation was over, of course they didn’t want to leave! But there wasn’t enough money to stay, so they flew back home. After they were home, those children faced a choice: either

they could be resentful and bitter because they got to spend only three days, or they could be grateful to their parents who had made it possible for them to spend the time they had had.

Isn't their situation just like our lives? A marriage that started out so full of promise ends in divorce. A child who is the light of her parents' lives contracts a fatal illness. We can spend the rest of our lives in self-pity and resentfulness and bitterness because life is not exactly going according to our plans and hopes, or we can be grateful to God because he has given us, along with these times of pain and agony, days that are filled with so many good things. As Christians, who know that the God who has created us is with us through all the joys and trials of life, we **can do our best and give God our best** no matter what our circumstances are.

We are called to do our best in the way we live our lives. If we are employees, we are called to give a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. If we're employers, we are to give a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. We are called **to do our best and give God our best** in our relationships with others, in our role as citizens, and in our community responsibilities.

We are called to **do all that we can** in the way we serve others. When Jesus talked about the final judgment, he said it will be God saying to some of us, "*For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me*" (Matthew 25:35-36). We'll say, "*Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?*" (Matthew 25:37-40). And he will reply, "*Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me*" (Matthew 25:40). We are to **do our best for God** as we serve others, just as "*the Son of Man, did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (Matthew 20:28).

We are called to **do our best** in our willingness to sacrifice our own wants, even our needs, even our lives -- should that be required.

God expects us to **do OUR best**, just as HE did in doing HIS best for us, giving us his own Son. The focus, however, is not just on those we are to help,

to serve, or to give to, but it is also on us. Do we learn more about the victim who received the care or about the Samaritan who helped him? In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, isn't the focus on the Rich Man who was clothed in purple and ate sumptuously every day, refusing even to notice Lazarus and his needs?

When we are **doing our best**, we are carrying out what we have been created to do! As Paul points out in Ephesians, "*For by grace [we] have been saved through faith. And this is not [our] own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*" Our salvation has been won for us by our Savior Jesus. Now comes our response to that gift: "*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*" (Ephesians 2:8-10). As we do those deeds God has created us to do, we surely **do our best**, and our lives will give evidence that we indeed "crown him Lord of all."

Lord God, Empower us by your grace to do our best in all that we do in your name. Amen.

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