

Through Serving

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"35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

I have been working at Service Learning Center from this spring. Service-learning targets to learn while working for others with a serving heart. ICU provides an academic program which includes a course to learn and prepare for their activities, and after the students have completed their service activities in and out of Japan during the summer, they have time to reflect and share what they have learned. Service Learning Center has been conducting this program since 2002.

My predecessors have been professors from the fields of social science. I am a mathematics professor, so it is hard to find an academic connection, but I am willing to learn about service-learning by joining the activities with students.

I would be lying if I said we have "All roads lead to Service Learning" as a slogan, but the staff members and I are considering service-learning from many points of view. So today I would like to share and think about service-learning with you as a "Service-Learning on Christmas."

Christmas is a time to celebrate the birth of Jesus, but what did Jesus do? In Mathews chapter 9 verse 35, it says,

"Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness."

Went to all the villages teaching, proclaiming, and curing. Or in other words, teaching, preaching, and healing.

I have been curious about the healing. In the Gospel, there are many parts where Jesus heals. If we read each passage carefully, we find that these are not written just as miraculous stories, but to show that Jesus has been sent by God and to show what kind of God that is.

However the passage we have just read merely says that Jesus healed every disease and every sickness. What do you think about this?

When I was watching a message video, the person on the video explained that the word healing meant to care. Although I agreed, I decided to do more research.

The Greek word used here is *therapeuo*. The English therapy comes from this word. If you look at a Greek dictionary, you find that this word means to heal, to care, to make better, but the first meaning is to serve or do service. I am not saying that Jesus did not heal, but I believe this passage shows how Jesus served the people who suffered from every disease and every sickness.

It says in the gospel that Luke was a doctor, and in Acts, which Luke is told to be the writer, it says,

"8 His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. 9 When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured."

There are two parts where the people are healed, but in verse 8, a different word, *iaomai*, is used and in verse 9, *therapeuo* is used. Did Jesus wipe away every disease, every disability, every worry and suffering by just waving a magic wand? Maybe he did. However, is not what Jesus did explained as serving every person?

It says in the gospel that the sick, disabled, tax collectors and the people called sinners came to Jesus. Also women and children. What is the reason for this?

In the verse right after the one we read says,

"36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

It says what Jesus saw by serving, were people who were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd, and he had compassion on them. The Greek word for having compassion is *splagchnizomai*. This word is used in the Bible only 12 times, and only in the gospel in principle when describing Jesus. I say 'in principle' because it is also used in the parable of Good Samaritan, and Prodigal Son. It originates from the meaning to have pain in your intestines because the heart was thought to be there. It shows how Jesus felt pain in his own heart while facing the pain of each person.

It might sound rude to say what Jesus did was Service Learning, but He suffered from the people in their pain and suffering. And if Jesus is the spokesman of God's heart, we may say that our God the Father is someone who is with us in our pain and suffering, and chooses to suffer with us.

I believe this image of Jesus is similar to the idea of "The Wounded Healer" by Henri Nouwen who was a Catholic priest, a theologian of spirituality and spent his final years serving for a community of people with mental disorder.

What do you think Jesus wants us to do?

'28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.
29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

What does it mean to take Jesus' yoke and to learn from him? I believe it has something to do with the fact that Jesus describes himself as gentle and humble in heart. And it also seems that taking Jesus's yoke is related to working together, living together, and bearing each others burdens. That may have something to do with serving one another, but what does that mean?

I hold Bible studies with students. It is based on the thought that there should not

be a differentiation between students who believe that Jesus is their savior, and students who do not. Maybe for that reason, I believe that more than half of the people in our Bible study are non-Christians. When I read the Bible with them, I learn new things and discover interesting parts. One of them where Jesus criticizes the scribes and Pharisees. For example in the Matthew chapter 23. What do you think the scribes and Pharisees did wrong?

Let's be a little self-deprecating and read the passage while change the scribes and Pharisees to university professors and Bible study organizers.

3 So you must be careful to do everything they, university professors and bible study organizers tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. 4 They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

7 they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others.

A little painful to our ears isn't it?

It continues like this,

'8 "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. 10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant.'

It seems that Jesus is criticizing how they do not serve each other as brothers. They do not join the people and share their pain but give diagnoses from a distance. It may be true that there are university professors including myself, who give diagnoses from one perspective.

I have learned many things since I started working for service learning, but one of them is

"Fixing and helping create a distance between people, but we cannot serve at a distance. We can only serve that to which we are profoundly connected."
(Rachel Naomi Remen)

To serve, you must fully interact with people, and not just from one perspective. In other words, there is a mutual relationship when you bear each other's yoke. I heard students who participated in Service-learning say how they felt that they were receiving the service and not the other way around. But when they say they are here for service-learning, more people opened up their hearts to them and told stories they could never have heard as tourists. The students said they felt that they were facing problems together, and I believe that is the essence of service.

Although at the same time, by serving, and connecting with people on a deep level, you are accepting the possibility of getting hurt, and that may be dangerous in a way. However that is what leads to a change in your path, makes you grow, and change how you live. I would like to watch over the students as they go through.

The Bible study I hold is discussion style, and I have the students think about the questions I ask. At the end I have each person say what they felt and thought. We are currently reading the gospel according to John, but when we came to chapter 13 where Jesus washes the disciple's feet and says "you also should wash one another's feet.", there were students who were okay with washing someone's feet, but uncomfortable being washed by someone else.

I myself have a similar experience. Have anyone heard of pokkuri-temple? It is said by worshipping, your death in the future will be sudden without any suffering. Until just recently, I was a pokkuri-temple believer and hoped for a sudden and painless death. However I realized that that meant I denied the existence of bedridden elderly. From then I stopped believing in the pokkuri-temple. When I told the students, I am counting on you when I get bedridden and can't even remember who you are, they all said "えー" and didn't seem like they were going to help.

I am recently feeling how classes at the university and the Bible study at our house are mutual situations. Everyone listens carefully, so I take time thinking up

questions, and preparing while thinking about each student. But when people come to our house and interact seriously, that is when we can have a wonderful time. When I am speaking in class, or in Bible studies, I feel that everyone is here to volunteer to listen.

Today I started speaking with “Service-Learning on Christmas” as the theme. I prepared and am talking to you now because I wanted to share what I have been thinking recently, but perhaps you are doing service as listening volunteers. I feel the world of learning becomes rich by serving one another.

When reading the gospel, especially, the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we can see how very few parts explain the reason for Jesus’ birth as redemption for our sins. The only part it says so is Matthews chapter 20 verse 28 “28 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.”

There is a similar part of Mark as well. There the redemption is added as just something he will do while he serves the people.

Christmas is the day the Son of God came to serve each person in this world. And perhaps it is the day we are invited to serve each other just as Jesus did. What will we learn by serving others? I believe the things we earned by serving each other is the precious Christmas gift from Jesus.

Our university was founded by international cooperation with the background of the crisis of civilization by the two World Wars, to materialize an original international society as a proving ground for international culture and understanding, and demonstrate the possibility of a world community.

Do you think this demonstration of the possibility of a world community is still going on? The UNESCO Constitution starts with the words, “That since wars begin in the minds of men.” How are those minds nurtured? “Educating Heart” are the words by Professor McCarthy who placed the foundation of Service-Learning at ICU, but can we not nurture the mind and heart to live together by serving each other?

Does a Christian University still have its meaning? If we are to learn from Jesus, I believe we should start by serving each person as Jesus did, and aim for a campus, a community opened to the world where the most treasured thing to do is to serve and love one another.

34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Recently when I speak to students, I end with this passage. The verb agapao is used here for the verb "to love," but the original meaning is to welcome. Just as Jesus welcomed us, Jesus wishes us to be a community where we welcome one another, love one another, serve one another, and learn and grow together.

While thinking this Christmas how Jesus lived and served, Let us pray,
"For you were called to freedom, brothers, and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. (Gal 5:13)"

Dear Heavenly Father, please lead us to love and become a slave to one another just as you taught by sending Jesus on Christmas.

In Jesus name, we pray, Amen.

Translated by Shio Tsurudome