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Sermon Transcript: The Servant Song

I recently had a friend ask me this question: "Did you watch a lot of Mr. Rogers when you were a kid?" It was a little odd. It was just plopped in the middle of our conversation. And I said, "Yeah, the truth is I watched a lot of Mr. Rogers." Now, for those of you who have no idea who I'm talking about, Mr. Rogers was a Presbyterian pastor who got his hands on a children's show on PBS and it was very popular and went on for many, many years and had such an influence in our culture that back after the tragedy of 9/11, it was Mr. Rogers that was asked to go on TV and talk to the people because of the connection they had had with so many when they were younger. And there's been some recent documentaries done about his life and books written. But yes, I loved Mr. Rogers. I sat before that television and worshiped Mr. Rogers. If Mr. Rogers would have said, "Okay, kids, I want you to go get your—your dad's wallet and your mom's purse and come to the TV," I'm pretty sure that my parents' bank accounts would be dry by the end of the day. I would have done anything. He had such a profound impact on my life. And when my friend asked me this question, I thought, "Yeah, but here's the thing." When I said to them, "Yeah, I watched a lot of Mr. Rogers," their response was something along the lines of, "Yeah, that makes sense." I guess though that's okay. I don't mind that. If that's a mistake I've made in my life, then that seems like a pretty beautiful mistake to make. And I realized that, yeah, I think in the back of my head, I actually believed all that stuff that that guy taught about how we're supposed to treat one another and the idea of being a good neighbor to one another. Like it actually went in there and landed and—and—and got a hold of my soul. It made me think about what am I really doing with my life? And of course, you know, and I—I went to a pretty deep reflection on that.

The Power Play of James and John

In this chapter of Mark, the disciples are still trying to figure out like, what's going on here? What's the purpose of what Jesus is doing? They're trying to get the big picture here, and their interpretation of it—of what he's trying to get them to guide their life with—goes way off the rails. James and John decide, "Oh, this is about authority. This is about power, about being in charge." And so, "Hey, Jesus, when—when, you know, when this all really comes to bear, we want to be your number one and number two guys." And I'll just say that this didn't go over well with the other ten. They weren't pleased with James and John's little power play grab that they were doing there. And Jesus tells them, "Look, this is not—this is not about power and authority. Despite all these amazing miracles, this is not what this is about."

Jesus says, "This is actually about becoming a servant to others. Are you ready for that?" And I feel like they were like, "Yeah, yeah, we're ready for whatever. Just give us the number one and number two seats." And he's like, "Yeah, you don't get it." But instead of letting that anger brew in the group, Jesus pulled the whole group together and gave them that lesson, saying that this is not—it's not about that. It's about being a servant to all. If we think about the other gospels and the times that Jesus is cornered on what—what this whole mission and ministry is about, he's very clear to say this is not about power and authority. It's about servanthood. And in fact, when he's cornered on, "Well, what's the most important rule? What's the most important thing that God wants us to know?" his response to them is to say that you love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul. And he gives them a second one for bonus: that you love one another. It's just one verb—love—in both of those commands. And it's the central point. And Jesus said, "All the law, all the stuff that God has tried to get across to you, all of the law, all of the things I've been trying to teach you, it all hangs on these two ideas, which, spoiler alert, is really just one idea: love." Because how God wants us to love God is by loving one another.

The Servant Song

Man, I started thinking about all this through—through my week, and I kept thinking about my—that question from my friend about like, have I lived my whole life just trying to create Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood? Is that—is that what I'm doing with my life? And then eventually I was like, "Rob, you got to start working on a sermon. You better get to work." So I put that aside and I started going through the worship service and I—you know, I saw the incredible blessing, the special music that we have today, and they even came and sang at the 8:00 service, which thank you for that. What a gift that was. And then I got to this song, "*Will You Let Me Be Your Servant?*" We've—we've talked about—Alex and I have talked about how like, wouldn't it be neat if we sang the song every time we had new members join the church, and wouldn't it be great if we sang it so much that you all got sick of it because we had that many people joining the church? Yeah. There's something different about this song and there's a couple of things I want to point out to you. The first of which is that this is the only hymn that I can think of that is not sung to God or telling some story about God. It's explicitly a hymn that we sing to each other. I can't think of another hymn that's meant for us to sing to each other. Now, I know what's going to happen after the service. There's going to be five of you go, "Well, what about hymn number 127?" You know, like, okay, fine. Fine, fine, fine, fine. I don't know all the hymns. But it's still rare. We can at least say that. And what's really neat about this, as I looked at it more, is that I thought to myself, this is kind of like—we talked about last week how like Mark in the Gospel of Mark, Mark likes to give you what's often called a Markan sandwich, where he starts one story and then takes a break and you get some meat in the middle and then you get the other slice of bread. You start one story, little other story, then finishes the first story. And commentators call that a

Markan sandwich, right? And so the funny thing is that this song is a bit—it's a little bit of a Markan sandwich. It's got the first verse and the sixth verse exactly the same, and then you got all the stuff in the middle. And when Mark does that, he's telling you, look at the stuff in the middle; it's going to make you understand everything else. And I think this song does the same. And then I started reading the lyrics—like really reading the lyrics of this song—and I realized, oh no, I can't preach a better sermon than this song. I'll put the words up on the screen for you so you can see them. It begins, *"Will you let me be your servant? Let me be as Christ to you."* It's—sometimes when we—we're going to serve others, there's a temptation to end up on top of a pedestal yourself. "Oh, let me serve you. You obviously are a wreck. Let you know, oh, I'm just—and I'm not going to give you a choice about it. I'm just—" But what I love is that the song begins with asking permission. *"Will you let me be your servant? Let me be as Christ to you. Then this is the pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant, too."* No one's—we're not playing the James and John game here. We're not going for number one and number two spots. What if we just served one another in an effort to be like Christ to one—what—what—what if we just did that? But what does it mean to do that? Don't worry, there's a second verse. *"We are pilgrims on a journey. We're together on the road. We're here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load."* Immediately recognizes that we all are going through an experience together and that if we see it that way—not as a race that we're each individually running, but what if it's that we're on a journey, a pilgrimage, a pilgrim, a seeking for what is holy, and that we're doing that together? And that we're not here to look over and go, "Whoa, look at all the junk that person has to carry. I'm glad I'm not them." But instead, we're looking around along the way and seeing that and helping one another to bear whatever load they have, whatever tragedy is coming to life, whatever pain, whatever difficulty, whatever circumstances, we make it our load, our journey, our shared caring of one another. That's what it looks like to be a servant to one another. And then it goes on, *"I will hold the Christ light for you in the nighttime of your fear. I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear."* We expect to be in dark spaces with one another. And what we do for one another is to serve as a reminder of God's love to one another. We don't let the people around us—and if we do it right, the people in our community as well, but we got to start somewhere—we don't let these people within this community find themselves in a dark space alone. And not only that, we come with the hope of Christ through loving and caring for one another. And we'll hold our hands out so that you don't walk alone. "I'm here with you, and I will speak of the peace that we have." Imagine what that is like to be in a community that fully embraces a willingness to walk through the dark valleys with one another. It goes on, *"I will weep when you are weeping. When you laugh, I'll laugh with you."* To have someone in your life that when you're in those moments where you can't hold back the tears, where the pain and the suffering and the brokenness is just tearing you apart and the tears are running down the

sides of your face—to have someone next to you who will weep with you, who will feel it with you, who will be so far into it with you that they are willing to weep with you. And these same friends are not just a bunch of misery-company folks. They'll actually—and when there's times of joy, they celebrate with you. Everything doesn't have to be a bummer.

"When things are good for you, I'm happy. You laugh, I laugh with you. I'm willing to fully be in this with you." Just as Christ was fully in humanity with us, I'm willing to be that with you. Imagine what that kind of community is and can be. *"I'll share your joy and sorrow till we've seen this journey through."* It goes on. *"And when we sing to God in heaven, we'll find such harmony, born of all we've known together of Christ's love and agony."* And I got stuck on the last word there. What? *"Born of all we've known together of Christ's agony."* And this phrase, "Christ's love and agony," is used throughout the centuries. And it's a phrase to indicate that what—what it's saying is that Christ's love for us is a sacrificial love. It's a—*it's a love that experiences agony for the sake of the other.* And this is the kind of servant kind of love that Christ is putting before the disciples in the tenth chapter of Mark, and that we are putting forth to one another within this community of faith—that—that we are willing to suffer in our service to one another. Not just do what's easy, not just give the leftovers, but to actually suffer for the sake of loving each other well. Then it comes back to the other side of the sandwich. *"Will you let me be your servant? Let me be as Christ to you. Pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant, too."*

Living the Vision

I think I have spent a lot of my life trying to create Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood, but I think you all have been trying to make this song. I think whatever the Holy Spirit is doing within this congregation is an attempt to live that song. And I think it just might be the case that that could be one of the most full and beautiful expressions of the gospel of Jesus Christ that we could ever manage if we could live that song. I love that you're here in our church family now. I love that you're part of it. I love that you joined the church today. I hope you experience that in your time with us. I hope we're that kind of church for you because then I think we're doing it right. And I hope you get the chance to do that for us, too. And I hope that for every single one of you. And you know what? It could be a big old mistake. Maybe this song isn't all that. But if we tried to live into that vision of what it means to love God and love one another that comes to us in the song—if we tried to do that and that was wrong, that was a mistake, that wasn't it—oh my goodness, what a beautiful mistake to make with my life. Can you imagine something better that you could do with your life than to create that type of community? Can you imagine something better that you could do with your life than to love that fully? Man, that sounds like a really good mistake to make with my life. Hallelujah. Amen.