Does the name Trey Quinn mean anything to you? I am guessing not – he is really not that important of a guy! Trey Quinn was the winner of this year’s Mr. Irrelevant title. Mr. Irrelevant is the award, if you want to call it that, bestowed upon the very last player drafted each year’s NFL player draft. Occasionally, the Mr. Irrelevant Winners will enjoy moderate success in the league, but much more often, they quickly fade into obscurity, unimportant to the success of the team that drafted them – irrelevant. With Trey Quinn, he hurt his ankle in the 1st pre-season game and was put on injured-reserve.

You maybe get the idea, that Mr. Irrelevant is a tongue in cheek type title - something nobody really wants to win. Because, after all, who wants to be irrelevant? Who wants to be forgettable? In our homes, classrooms, workplaces, and in our church, we want to think that we are doing important things, things that people see and admire. There is a part of each of us that wants to be Mr or Mrs Important - not Mr or Mrs Irrelevant.

Today, Jesus encourages us to give serious thought to how we define important and irrelevant. And more importantly, how God defines what is important and what is irrelevant. It all starts with James and John saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. Jesus had just finished pouring out his heart in front of his disciples. He confided in them that his time with them was short. He was going to be taken away from them soon, and not only that, but taken away from them in a horrific, violent fashion. The Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the experts in the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him. On the third he will rise again.

And in response to that very important piece of information, the disciples respond with something very trivial. No words of sympathy are offered, no: Lord, is there anything we can do for you?

Instead: James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approached him and said, Teacher, we wish that you would do for us whatever we ask. That sentence is only 12 words long, yet James and John managed to squeeze three first person selfish pronouns into it! And their request was equally as self-serving. Promise that we may sit, one at your right and one at your left, in your glory. The disciples were prone to jockeying for position among themselves, arguing their case regarding which of them should be considered most important. As they return from the Mount of Transfiguration, they are arguing about who is the greatest. As they gather around the table in Upper Room on Maundy Thursday, they are arguing about who is the greatest.

And when the other disciples heard about James and John’s ambitions here, the air once again became charged with emotion and anger. The other disciples were indignant when they heard about the request of the brothers. Who do they think they are? I hope that they don’t think they are better than us. And I certainly hope they don’t think that we are going to be taking orders from them anytime soon.

The disciples could not stomach the thought of being a servant to someone they considered an equal. Then again, neither can we! Our sinful nature does not want us to serve anyone but ourselves - not even God. Now we are probably not so crass as to envision ourselves as the kings or queens of our household. But on the other hand, we do like to be right. We do like things to be done our way. We do like our down time, our me time - and we
react with grumpiness and attitude if someone, anyone, infringes on it. Time spent taking care of somebody else, is time not spent taking care of me, doing the things that I want to do, the things that I benefit from.

Not to mention that fact that serving others is often dirty work. Serving may mean having to do something that is unpleasant, something that is uncomfortable, something that seems unimportant or even - irrelevant.

And so Jesus sits us down with the Twelve and tells us: The things you think are so irrelevant? Those are the things that are truly important! Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave of all. With the benefit of spiritual hindsight today, you can see just how beautiful this is. You know how this story plays out - so you know that not only was Jesus telling them to be servants, at that very moment, he was humbling himself to be their servant!

Remember the words of Paul to the Philippians: Indeed, let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Though he was by nature God, he did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed, but he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant. When he was born in human likeness, and his appearance was like that of any other man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross. Isaiah said basically the same thing in fewer words in our Old Testament lesson: Poured out his life to death, and he let himself be counted with rebellious sinners.

See how Jesus poured himself out for us? He let the soldiers take his clothes, though he knew it would humiliate him. He let the spitters and spitters have their way, though he knew that his good name would be destroyed. He let the nails pierce his flesh, though he knew that the pain would be indescribable. He let our mountain of sin be piled on his shoulders, though he knew that the weight would buckle his knees and drag him down the deepest depths. He willingly let all those things be done to him - because he knew that it was not about him. It was not about saving himself. It was about saving you and me.

When Isaiah said, He let himself be counted with rebellious sinners, you know who is included with the rebellious sinners? It was not just the two thieves crucified with him. It was us. We are the transgressors! On Good Friday, Jesus willingly stood with the law-breakers. On Good Friday, he willingly gave up his life as a substitute for the lawbreakers. He could have walked away at any moment, but instead poured out his life to death, and he let himself be counted with rebellious sinners, because he put your needs and my needs ahead of his own. He was serving us. That is what he came to do. The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

A lot of people may look at being a servant as a humbling experience, but I think you would agree, that being served can be even more humbling, especially when the one serving us is Jesus! Like Peter in the Upper Room, we look with astonishment at all he has done for us, all he still does for us, and we say: Lord, are you going to wash my feet?

As Jesus once stooped to wash the disciples’ feet, today he stoops to interact with sinful mankind. In fact, he is doing it right now. Is it any wonder that we call this a worship service? In our public worship, our gracious Savior opens his hand and sends us his Holy Spirit. He serves us with his powerful Word, with the cleansing waters of baptism, with the life-giving nourishment of his Holy Supper. Here the Son of Man still serves us. The strong serves the weak. The Creator serves the created. The powerful and permanent serves the temporary and the fragile.

Love so amazing, so divine demands my life, my soul, my all, we sing in a hymn. That is why we serve him here - with our confession, our offerings, our focused attention, our
prayers and praises. That is why we serve him when we leave here. And how do we serve him? By doing just what he has done. By putting the needs of the people around us ahead of our own. We serve him when we serve them. We put him first, when we put them first.

At one of my former churches, I happened to be in the men’s bathroom before the service. And as I washed my hands and reached for the paper towels, I saw an older gentleman next to me take 2 or 3 paper towels himself. He walked over to the sink and gently cleaned up the excess soap and water that had pooled on the countertop. No one asked him to do it. It is possible that no one else even noticed. But I remember that forgettable little act to this day. That seemingly irrelevant act shines for me as a beacon of selfless service.

He did not do it to be noticed or thanked. He did it because he loved his Savior and saw that it needed to be done. That incident happened at church - but our opportunities to serve are not limited to this place. In fact, we will probably find most of those opportunities in our homes, in our classrooms, in our workplaces. Look for them when you get home today, look for them when you clock in tomorrow.

Yes, serving others requires sacrifice. Yes, some of the things you do might go unappreciated or completely unnoticed. But you are not doing them to be appreciated, you are not doing them to be noticed. You are doing them out of appreciation for and imitation of the Savior. No matter how irrelevant they may seem, works of humble service done for him - those are things that are truly important. Amen.

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