

*5The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" 6The Lord replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. 7"Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here at once and take your place at the table'? 8Would you not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink'? 9Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? 10So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'"*

In all the years I have been at this church a great unresolved question is: Should we applaud when a choir sings? Or when there is a particularly moving solo? Or when a musician plays with a depth of feeling? Some of you who arrived here after the church council voted to discourage applause during worship must wonder when some applaud and many do not. It all began when a soloist received applause and declared that his solo was worship and not performance. He requested that the congregation be instructed not to applaud. Yet in our culture applause is a way of expressing our thanks – our gratitude for a job well done. It is like an instant thank you note.

But once there has been applause, is applause expected from that time on? Is silence forever after a kind of criticism? What about enthusiastic applause verses polite applause? This is a complicated subject.

In our gospel reading today Jesus makes an interesting comparison. "Who among you would say to a slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here at once and take your place at the table'? Would you not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink'? Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'"

"We are only worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done." Should we teach the Junior Choir and the Senior Choir to repeat these words after they sing? The lector after she has read? The ushers and the communion assistants? We are only worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done.

What about those who give money? Instead of a note of thanks for gifts to support the ministries of this congregation should we suggest that they are only worthless servants who have done only what they ought to have

done? Those who brought food for the potluck today – those who mow the lawn and care for the flowers – those who visit the sick and feed the hungry – all worthless servants who have done only what they ought to have done?

Now I would understand if some of you had this attitude about me – I am getting paid. But all of the gifts of time and talents and energy that are given out of love for Christ – given because Christ has commanded that we love our neighbor and that we love God – surely these gifts all deserve thanks! But Jesus says, “When you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, “We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!”

Why does Jesus tell us this? Does he want us to have low self-esteem? Does he want us to always put ourselves down? I think not.

In the catechism in the explanation to the first article of the creed, Martin Luther teaches us to confess: I believe that God has created me and all that exists. He has given me and still preserves my body and soul and all their powers. God provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work and all I need from day to day. God also protects me in time of danger and guards me from all evil. All this he does out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy though I do not deserve it.

Though I do not deserve it. Life and every good thing that God gives I do not deserve. That is what Luther wants the children to be taught. Everything we have is a gift of God that we do not deserve. But God gives everything just the same. If you and I truly believe that what attitude would fill our hearts? Gratitude - not an attitude of entitlement – of feeling we deserve every good thing God gives - but gratitude - deep and lasting gratitude.

What a difference it makes when someone offers himself or herself and the gifts God has given out of an attitude of gratitude! Not looking for thanks or a pat on the back but giving freely! Luther teaches our response to all that God gives would be to thank and praise, serve and obey God - out of gratitude.

Truly we are worthless slaves – deserving nothing good from God. But God gives to us so many blessings – not because we deserve but out of love. God gives us the very life of God’s son, not because we deserve but out of

love. God makes the worthless slaves the honored guests at God's banquet. A reason to be grateful? –there could be no better.

So how can we show our gratitude? Any way we want. I am free to say thanks to people who were only doing what they ought to have done. And so are you.

The word Asante means thank you in Swahili. Who could you thank? You could thank God through buying the things women who are poor have made. You could thank others in this congregation and in your life by giving them the things you purchase. You are free to do that.

You are free to give your whole life in gratitude to God – free to care for the earth and care for people – free to applaud if you like – free to give yourself when there will be no gratitude or applause given back to you. Because God has so richly blessed you and promises to hold on to you forever you are free.

Thanks be to God.