Mark 9:30-37  
15th Sunday after Pentecost  
September 24, 2000

When I go into a restaurant, take a seat at a table, place an order, I expect to be served. Served by the hostess who seats me, the waiter who takes my order, the cook who prepares the food, even the cleaning staff that is responsible for the appearance of the restrooms. All serve me and if they do not – I find a new restaurant.

But I wonder, who serves here?

When I go to the grocery store and ask for help from an employee so often I receive even more help than I ask. Instead of, “You’ll find that over in aisle five,” many times The person takes the time to take me there. I know I am being served.

But I wonder, “Are people served here like that?”

When I go to the EMH Health Center to work out all the staff greets me by name. Whatever I ask of them they try their best to fulfill. I know that I am honored by how they treat me.

I wonder, “Are people honored like that here?”

Who is served, who is honored in the church? Last week when we resumed the procession with the choir during the second service, the pastors followed the choir out of the sanctuary. One person was concerned that pastors should go first. Now I have noticed that the bishop always goes last in a procession. Is last the place of highest honor, like the bride entering when all others are present. Or is entering last the sign of humility, taking the least important place in the procession?

Who is honored, who is served, who does the honoring, who does the serving here?

Jesus taught his disciples, The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise. But the disciples did not understand him and were afraid to ask.

But they were not afraid to argue who among them was the greatest. Up to this point there had been a lot of glory – healings, exorcisms, great demonstrations of power. Who would be closest to Jesus, be served and honored with him? But Jesus told them, “Whoever wants to first must be last of all and servant of all.”
Who is served, and who is servant? Who is honored and who does the honoring? You are the one served by Jesus, honored by Jesus. Before you were even born Jesus gave his life for you. Today, Jesus offers his body and blood to you. You are the honored guest at his table, filled with the very finest he can give, himself. You are the one whom he has promised to hear, inviting you to bring your every concern to him, whether great or small. You pray, Jesus listens. You are the honored guest.

And yet, you are the servant. You are appointed to be a little Christ for your neighbor. You whom Christ has put first now put your neighbor first, before your own needs and wants. Especially your weakest and poorest and humblest neighbors.

Jesus took a child and put it among the disciples and taking it in his arms he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.” A child that has nothing to pay you, and that has earned nothing from you – a child – not your own, but a stranger’s child, a poor stranger’s child, a hungry stranger’s child – to serve a child is to serve God. Honor a child – you have honored God.

Who is served and who is servant?

Is the bishop to be honored or is he to honor me? Am I to be served by you or am I to serve you? Are the longtime members of the congregation to be recognized by the newcomers or are the longtime members called to honor those who were strangers to them a day ago?

Who is served and who is to be served? Does the second week visitor serve the first week visitor, the teenager the 80 year old? The 80 year old the teenager?

In life we are all the child who is welcomed – in life we are all called to be the one who welcomes the child. Jesus serves us all, we all serve him and one another.

This is not a restaurant nor a grocery store nor a health club. Nothing can be purchased here, nothing is for sale, everything is a gift. Jesus cannot be purchased here, bought with your offerings, for you cannot buy what has
already been given as a gift. And so also you give yourselves to each other, giving to those who are in no way worthy of your love the gift of honor and service. Do strangers deserve what you give, no more than you deserve what Christ has given you. But Jesus desires that you love as he has loved, serve others as he has served you.

Sometimes we as people get turned in on ourselves. The same can happen to us as a church. Our Lord calls us to serve not ourselves but our neighbors. For us as a church this means those who do not gather with us in this place. Neighbors who are difficult to love, people who have lost of habit of gathering with us, those who suffer, those who are in prison. Jesus sends his church to them for he is always giving himself for those who do not deserve him. You, and I and every one we meet.