

## Title: “Ready To Serve”

Chris Ryan

Luke 1:38

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**Service Readings:** 1 Samuel 3:1-10; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 1:26-38

*Today we honor the service of the Lutheran Women in Mission organization.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

In our Gospel passage today, the angel said to Mary, “For nothing will be impossible with God.” And Mary responded, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” She was ready to serve in the way that God had called her to do so. And in our Old Testament reading, Samuel also replied positively when God called him into service: “Speak, for your servant hears.” Two people that exemplify the servant heart that God calls each of us to have. And what beautiful examples they are. Samuel would become known throughout the land as a great prophet – exhorting Israel to turn from idolatry and serve only God. He would push back when they demanded a king and he would call out to God for wisdom and direction. And God would answer and speak directly to him. And Mary.... History would remember her as the mother of Jesus, God’s son! Is there any more honor that could be bestowed upon an individual? Samuel and Mary. Two people; Two hearts laid open to God for his service. But there is also a third person that we read about today. That is, of course, our Lord and Savior, Jesus.

“Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup>And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient...”

Jesus, our Lord, in the ultimate form of service, entered into his creation as man and became obedient to the Father – becoming the perfect servant, even more perfect than Samuel and Mary.

Three people who served willingly. Three people who God used for his glory. And if this were a Hallmark movie, that is about as deep as the plot would get – barely breaking the surface of what it means to serve. But this is not such a movie and so I invite you to pull out your scuba gear (maybe left over from this year’s VBS event) and dive into the lives of these people more deeply. What we’ll find is a richer understanding of service – one that exposes the rewards, but also the costs, of allowing God to work through you. We’ll do this by creating our own deep Hallmark movie that we will call “Divine Purpose: Answering His Call.”

A camera sweep from a crisp evening sky into a cozy living room in a mountainside wood lodge. The room is overly decorated for Christmas – no less than three full size trees with coordinating, but simplistic decorations. One of them, a large 14’ fir is adorned with simple silver and gold orbs. From every needle hangs a silver tinsel, and since this scene is modeled after a Hallmark set, not a single piece of tinsel can be found on the wood floor or on a character’s sweater. All is, quite simply, decorated to perfection. In the middle of the great rustic wall sits a large stone fireplace. The logs, perfect in size, shape, and position, are ablaze and yet, no ash is to be found beneath. Standing stage left of that visual anchor are three people in lighthearted conversation – two men and one woman. Each exactly 5’ 9” in height. Each adorned in clothing almost unrealistic in appearance. Each with a wine glass that never seems to empty, no matter how often they drink. They are jovial, overtly friendly, and unmistakably kind. They are perfect Hallmark characters, in a perfect Hallmark lodge, with the perfect Hallmark movie opening. As the scene fades to black it becomes clear to us that the movie will follow the lives of each of these people in parallel. The next scene opens with Samuel, or Sam as his friends call him.

Sam is a charismatic leader. When he enters a room, people immediately sense that if anything bad happens, he will be the one they can turn to. Leadership seems to just emanate from him. He is always levelheaded, calm in every situation, and seems to always know what to do. And he is kind. They say he has a big heart – a huge one that is always on display, always open to other people. He loves to help, but not for his own glory. He knows that God is working through him and he welcomes it, enjoys it, and is even humbled by it. Sam desires nothing more than to please his creator. And as the movie progresses we find that Sam lives a pretty good life. He will die an old man, knowing that he has pleased God.

Mary, on the other hand, has a personality that is quite different from Sam. She is introverted, almost to a fault. She shies away from gatherings unless it is with the very closest of friends. And even then, in the presence of those she grew up with, she barely speaks a word. It takes prompting and encouragement from others before she will share the thoughts in her mind. But what she lacks in words and maybe even social skills, she makes up for in quiet, selfless love. She finds her true self when she serves the less-fortunate. Oh, how she would love to serve in the shelters all day and night! When she is there, when she is serving dinner, or sitting with the aged, or consoling the brokenhearted, she can almost *feel* God working through her. She knows this is what he has called her to do and she prays that she can continue until her last breath. But very quickly it becomes apparent to the audience that God is calling her to *now serve* in a different way! She will bear the savior of the world. This timid, shy young woman will not fade into history but will instead be placed within its bright spotlight. She will become a costar to the ultimate star! And at the time of her calling, the audience believes that this recognition, this fame, will be the cost of God's calling. But as the movie progresses they discover a cost far greater that she will pay. She will be ridiculed for her pregnancy outside of marriage. She will be driven out of that great mountain town and back to her hometown where she will hide out with family until she can catch her breath and figure out the next steps. And many years later, after the rumors and snickering ceases, her heart will be torn apart – completely torn apart when she sees her son crucified on a cross. He will be unbearable to look at, unrecognizable because of the torture that his body endured. But she'll recognize him. And her heart will feel ever beating and every lash his body endured. And her heart will feel the piercing of each nail and thorn that punctures his body. Serving God can bring a person to her knees in emotional pain and anguish. Why? Why would God call her to serve and then allow her to suffer as she does? She trusts God; she trusts that he knows her pain; she trusts that he remains in control; and she prays that someday she will understand. But for now, in this moment, she has nothing to cling to except her son, and in faith that is exactly what she does. The plot line for her ends with her kneeling at her son's bloody feet.

The final plotline in this movie is that of Jesus. God, himself, taking the form of his creation, stepped out of heaven.

“...though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup>And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

What more can be said? Perfect obedience. Perfect service to the Father. Salvation was won because of his service. And yet that service cost Jesus dearly. It cost him much more than Samuel would ever imagine. It cost him much more than Mary ever experienced. It cost him separation from the Father. He suffered hell. But it was a cost he willingly paid, for each one of us. And it was a cost that now benefits the entire world. The movie ends with an empty tomb and a resurrected Lord.

What does this movie teach us? It teaches us that when we allow God to work through us we will experience joys that we might never have imagined, but we might also experience pain that is so intense, so overwhelming, that we will be driven to the Father because there will be nothing else to grab onto. Serving can hurt. Serving can demand sacrifice. Serving can require cost. But serving will also bring glory to God.

Serving will be how Jesus follows after the lost sheep and brings them back into the fold. Serving will be how others will be added to the church body.

The organization that, until last year was known as LWML and is now known as Lutheran Women in Mission has never shied away from serving. For over eighty years they have strived to joyfully proclaim Christ, support missions, and equip women to honor God by serving others. And they have done so through the collection of mites, the distribution of grants, and the direct service efforts of each member. Like Samuel and Mary, they have seen the fruits of their labor, they have seen how God has worked through this organization, but they know that it doesn't come without a cost. Serving takes time, it takes money, and it takes people, and they face a challenging foe with the competitions of those resources in today's world. And yet, they continue on because they know that this is what God has called these women to do. This is how he has chosen to use each one of them.

And so, as we recognize this organization, and specifically those women who form this organization, we recognize all of their efforts and all of their sacrifices. But we do more than that. We look to them as a model and we look to their work as a call to action. Each one of us, *women and men* should find motivation in their activities to go out and be the hands and feet of Christ. It will take sacrifice – time and resources, but this is what we do because of what Jesus has done for each one of us. And so we serve, not because it makes us feel good, and not just because it will help bring others to the knowledge of Jesus, but because it will strip us of every ounce of selfish will and desire and drive us to our knees where we will call out to God for strength.

Serve, because when you do so, it will bring you into a richer, deeper, more meaningful relationship with the one who served in an ultimate way, suffered in an ultimate way, and now graciously promises you an eternal life in an ultimate way – through his continued serving of his own body and blood at his table.

So, this morning I offer you a renewed call to action: Go and serve, in the name of Jesus our Savior.

Please pray with me.

We give thanks for the faithful women of the Lutheran Women in Mission. Bless their service and sacrifices as they spread Your love through acts of mercy and support for mission work around the world. Guide their hands as they labor, open their hearts to those in need, and strengthen their spirits for the work ahead. May their efforts bear fruit and bring glory to Your name.

Amen.