

**TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**  
**Year A     September 28, 2014**

**Theme: That's What We Christians Do**

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Perhaps you do not remember the names of Kent Brantly and Nancy Writebol, but you will remember their story.

They are respectively the Christian missionary doctor and aid worker who contracted the deadly disease of Ebola while ministering among the people of Liberia.

Both ultimately were flown to Emory University in Georgia and recovered.

But the question a CNN news story asked was: *"When it comes to things like Ebola, why would missionaries chose to put their own lives at risk?"*

Some praised Brantly and Writebol as heroic.

Conservative commentator Ann Coulter, on the other hand, was unsympathetic, saying Brantley's health status had been "downgraded to 'idiotic.'"

Nancy Writebol's husband, David, who remained in Liberia working with Ebola patients, answered the critics saying:

*"But it's that very calling [of service] that demonstrates the characteristics, the great things that Christ has done for humanity. He left heaven and he came to a place of suffering and trouble and went about doing good."*

Now all of us are clearly not called to work among Ebola patients, but there can be no doubt the core of the Christian message is our calling is to imitate the example of Christ in his self-emptying life-style of service to others.

Few scriptures outline this calling as exquisitely, as unambiguously as does the text we heard today from Paul's Letter to the Philippians.

In this text, our parish patron uses simple, easily understood phrases to urge his beloved congregation to practice in their own everyday lives the mindset Jesus Himself practiced.

**“Do nothing out of selfishness...humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others.”**

No complicated theology here; we all know what each of these mean:

- put others and their needs first;
- regard others as more important than yourselves;
- look out for the interests of others rather than just your own.

We also know how difficult and often demanding living these attitudes can be.

In the midst of a society that urges in advertising and culture to look out for number one and take care of our own, putting others first runs against the mainstream.

And how do you train yourself, let alone your children, to consider other people as more important than you are, as deserving more, better, greater than you?

No, **you** go first; **you** take the last piece of pie; **you** lead the work team; **you** be sure your family gets up there ahead of us.

Why do we Christians have this attitude?

As a fellow preacher asked: *“Why do Christians walk through life feeling a humble sense that we owe service to people, rather than them owing us?”*

*The answer is that Christ loved us and died for us and forgave us and accepted us and justified us and gave us eternal life and made us heirs of the world when he owed us nothing.”*

St. Paul, either quoting a hymn they already knew or writing his own soaring poetry, told the Philippians: **“Have in you the same attitude that is in Christ Who emptied himself.”**

Hear that word Paul used: **“Christ emptied himself.”**

He emptied himself of being God and became a lowly human being like us.

He emptied himself of life and let himself be put to death, put to death on a humiliating cross.

**Because of this selfless service on our behalf,  
God raised him up  
“that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue confess that  
Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.”**

Our call to selfless service of others – whether in caring for Ebola patients or giving Sunday mornings to teach religious education or visiting a lonely neighbor or exercising restraint with a coworker or volunteering at the Table of Hope or being patient with an elderly parent at a nursing home...

...our service springs from the self-emptying service of Christ on our behalf.

He emptied his body of life and poured out his blood.

Every time we empty ourselves for others we honor his memory and perpetuate the mystery of his living presence among us.