

*Words to Serve By*

1 Peter 4:7-11

I heard this funny guy once talk about how church people have responded to what Jesus said about feeding the hungry, and giving a home to the homeless and clothes to people who have none; about visiting people who are in prison. Go do it, Jesus said. He wasn't if-fy about this; his instructions to the people who listened to him weren't hard to understand or confusing.

Can you imagine, this guy said, if my children responded to what I tell them to do in the same way that Christians have often responded to this commandment from Jesus? Picture this, he said: I tell my 10-year-old daughter to go make her bed. And she says, "Well, that's a really good idea, Dad. Let me think about that some more. I'll study what you've said; I'll go back and look at it in Hebrew and Greek. I'll think about what your childhood was like, what happened to you to make you think that a clean room is important. Let me repeat what you said for a few thousand years, reflect on it deeply, and then if it still seems relevant, maybe I'll do it."

I'm pretty sure that is not what Jesus had in mind.

It's dangerous to anthropomorphize God too much—to give God human characteristics until God begins to look just like us. But sometimes it helps us to understand something that feels big and mysterious and beyond us, hard to put into words, or even into thoughts. So just for a moment, imagine God as a parent, and us as God's children who are trying to express our love and gratitude for what we've received, how blessed we are.

One way to do that would be for us to say thank you. A million times, thank you. Gratitude is important, and it is good for us. We can praise God—remember, and say out loud how great God is, what wonderful things God has done. This is what much of church worship has traditionally been. And this too is good for us. Saying it, singing it, reminds us that we are not God ourselves; that there is something bigger and more powerful and more important than the little world that revolves around us.

But think about it: if you are the parent, is this what you want *most* from your children? Praise, adoration, thank you's? I think what parents want to see in their children, what gives them the greatest joy, a sense of satisfaction that they have done their parenting job well, is a life well lived. They want to see that their children understand what they were trying to tell them all along—about what matters, about makes a good life. Parents want to see that their children have absorbed their values, and are living those values. This is the best thank you a child can offer, the best reward a parent can hope for.

This is the worship we are offering God today. Today we are saying, "We heard you, Jesus." And, "We love you, God. We love you in the way that matters to you. We are serving you in the way you told us we would make you happy."

Today we are worshiping with our hands as well as with our ears and our minds. We are loving other people as a way of loving God.

In just a few minutes, as we all put our hands into the work of [feeding hungry people](#) around the world, it's not just a nice thing to do.

It is worship.