

Far More Significant
Pastor Ethan Boester
St. James, Chicago

If you've ever flown on a plane, you've been told to "put your own mask on first." And while this is an important instruction for flights, the saying has become a metaphor for life, similar to the idea that you "can't pour from an empty cup." And there is truth in recognizing that we are tired, exhausted, and sometimes need to care for ourselves. But there is a point when caring for ourselves becomes "me first." When our own wants, comfort, and interests become more important than the people God has placed around us. Into that way of thinking, Paul speaks a very different word: "In humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Philippians 2:3-4) Christian love says, "You first."

But this kind of love does not come naturally to us. We disagree, we grumble, and we find ourselves wanting our way. So where do we find the strength to love others this way? We find it in Jesus. Jesus is the Bridegroom who gave Himself for His bride, the Church. He did not put Himself first. He put you first. He gave His life for your salvation, forgave your sins, and loved you even when your love was hesitant, conditional, and focused on yourself. His love is far more significant than anything we could produce on our own. He died so that you would live; He forgives so that you would have salvation; He loved, so that you would love.

This does not mean pretending we are never tired or that our own needs do not matter. After all, Paul says to look "not only" to your own interests. Your cup does need to be filled when empty, though it isn't you who fills it. It is Christ who poured out forgiveness on the cross, not just filling your cup, but making it overflow. And while it doesn't mean ignoring your needs, it does mean that our exhaustion cannot become permission to stop loving our neighbor. When we fail – and we will – we do not simply try harder to become people who never fail. We return to Christ, whose forgiveness fills our empty cups. He put you first when you had put yourself first. He forgave you and gave Himself for you. And so, as His gathered people, we confess to one another, we ask for forgiveness, and most importantly, we forgive. Just as He has forgiven us.