

## **“You’ve Gotta Serve Somebody”**

*“If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other”*

*Mother Teresa*

The quote above strikes at the heart of many of our problems. Every major wisdom tradition teaches that we belong to each other, yet somehow we keep forgetting this to our detriment. I have been writing and speaking about loneliness lately. We’ve all been lonely at various times in our lives and perhaps even more so during the pandemic. In my research on the topic I’ve discovered that one of the best cures for loneliness is service. It turns out that service to others opens our hearts and minds to the truth that we do, in fact, belong to each other.

The war in Ukraine is heartbreaking in so many ways, but because social media is bringing the suffering of the people involved as close to us as our cell phones, it makes it much harder to compartmentalize it as being someone else’s problem in a far away place. Who can see videos and pictures of a little girl singing a tune from *Frozen* in a bomb shelter and not want to reach out to her? That is just one of hundreds of examples of the pictures of suffering and need that we see or hear about. The war is tragic, of course, but because we see it so graphically on our screens it is a vivid reminder that “we belong to each other.”

We want to help these people—we want to serve them in whatever ways we can, because we are so strikingly reminded that we are not separate from them. They had lives, hopes, and dreams just like ours only a couple of short months ago. I’ve had numerous conversations with friends who are all asking each other how they might best help. People in my morning meditation groups are asking each other for ways to serve the people who are displaced by war. One member reminded us of Chef Jose Andres’ World Central Kitchen. Chef Andre, you may remember, is the Spanish trained chef who founded the World Central Kitchen in 2010 after the earthquake in Haiti. This organization now shows up to feed hungry people whenever there is a humanitarian disaster. Think of how satisfying it feels to hand a hungry person a plate of food—no matter what the circumstance.

There are many heroic acts of service, and varied opportunities to support organizations that serve those in need. Serving others is basic to our humanity. It really is something we are driven to do by our deep awareness that we are not separate but that we do, indeed, belong to each other. As the Nobel Laureate, Bob Dylan reminds us “It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you’re gonna have to serve somebody.” So I suggest we start paying attention to all the opportunities we have to serve each other. We are actually doing so every day. We could not survive otherwise—not just because we need help from others, but because we *need to serve*. So when a friend or acquaintance needs your help, remember that they are offering you an opportunity to do what you must do.

For instance, right now I have the privilege of taking one of my friends to work everyday since she has had foot surgery that prohibits her driving for several weeks. I know she could have gotten Uber or some other ride service but when she told me about her condition I offered to drive her to work. I realized I was being handed a simple but satisfying opportunity for service. She is grateful for the ride, but I am more grateful for the opportunity to serve a friend. Acts of service, of course, can be much more spontaneous and simple than this. Another friend told me of an opportunity that came to her the other day. She was visiting a friend in memory care when a somewhat confused and lonely looking woman walked into the area where they were visiting. This person looked so lost that my friend walked over to her and gave her a kiss on the cheek. This simple act of kindness brought tears of comfort and relief to the lonely woman's eyes. If you are wondering how you might best serve, St. John of the Cross has this simple advice for us. "Put love where there is no love and then you will find love." Then you will remember that "we belong to each other."