

Along the Way January 31 Ask Not

John F. Kennedy's 1961 inaugural address inspired children and adults to see the importance of civic action and public service. His historic words, "Ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country," challenged every American to contribute in some way to the public good.

Some of you will remember this inaugural speech, against a backdrop of snow and sunshine, thousands of people huddled in 20-degree temperatures on the east front of the Capitol to witness the event. In preparing for this moment, Kennedy sought both to inspire the nation and to send a message abroad signaling the challenges of the Cold War and his hope for peace in the nuclear age. Those words, "Ask not what your country..." were inked on my heart and I have carried them through many life situations. Often when I have joined a new church, I have asked myself, "Ask not what this church can do for me, but what I can do for this church?"

If citizens are only concerned about what's in it for them, it doesn't bode well for the country. In the same manner, if members of the church are only concerned about what they receive, it doesn't make for a healthy church. It can reduce worship to entertainment (did I like it or not?), church attendance to whim (do I feel like going?) and spiritual maturity stays superficial.

To ask "what can you do?" helps move us beyond our own egos into what I think it means to be servant leaders. One of the most moving stories in the New Testament is when Jesus is gathered with his followers in the Upper Room and removes his cloak and takes up a towel in order to wash the feet of those present. Jesus, the leader of this new movement, washed the feet of his followers. He didn't ask what they could do for him but offered what he could do for them.

And since we are all called to be servant leaders, what will be the thing you do for this faith community this year?