

Scriptures and Sermon for Sunday, October 18, 2015

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Mark 10:(32-34)35-45

(They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.")

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized,

you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

This is the Word of the Lord...

Let us pray... May the words of my mouth...

Lutheran pastor, Delmer Chilton, reflected on this passage with the following story:

Sir Isaac Newton, the great scientist and mathematician, had a dog that he loved very much. Wherever Newton went, the dog went with him. One time he had worked for months and months on a theory about the nature of the universe, working late into the night by candlelight, his worktable covered with papers, which were in turn covered with formulas

and theorems and conclusions. Late one night, Newton got up from the table to leave the room and the dog jumped up and bumped the table, turning over the candle, which set Newton's papers on fire. Newton returned to the room to find years of work gone up in flames. He put out the fire, then sat on the floor and wept. The dog nuzzled up to him and licked his face and Newton hugged his dog and said, "You will never, ever know what you have done." (Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods*, p. 36)

Another story: When Eve took the fruit from the tree and when Adam took the fruit from Eve; things fell apart. And God looked at Adam and Eve with great sadness and said, "You will never ever know what you have done."

The story goes on: what began in Adam and Eve keeps showing up in the Bible. Time and time again, God's people play out a personal little Garden of Eden in which they discover their all too common capacity for doing things that tear God's creation apart. And God kept on weeping and shaking his head and telling the people, "You have no idea what you have done."

The story is: No matter how many times Jesus tells the disciples that to follow him meant following the way of the cross (and this is the THIRD time in the book of Mark that he spells this out for him) they just did not get it. They allowed their own personal little Garden of

Eden to come into play and they began to look after only themselves and their needs and interests and pleasures and desires. They **totally** missed the message of servanthood and instead sought to establish themselves in positions of power and privilege. And God in Christ shook his head sadly, saying, “You have no idea what you are doing, do you?”

The story continues with us... 21st century Christians: Each and every day we wake up, get out of bed and head into the world surrounded by the love and grace of God. And yet, many of us will allow our own personal little Garden of Eden inform our thinking and actions. Some of us will enter the world wondering what will be done TO us and how we might manage to survive. Some of us might expect the world to do something FOR us to lift us up and to make our lives easier. Then there are those of us who will take stock of what we believe the world OWES us. I can imagine Jesus standing with his arms folded across his chest, shaking his head and saying, “You STILL have no idea what you are doing, do you?”

I suppose it is human nature to seek to be on the top. Our animal instincts keep us in the ‘survival of the fittest’ mode of living. We believe we need to be the smartest, strongest, youngest, wealthiest, most beautiful, best at what we do, (and the list goes on) or

someone better will come along and replace us or take away our value.

So, who are we serving when we wake up and choose to live this way? The answer is we are serving **ourselves!** We live as **self-serving** individuals, focused on what is best for us and how we can keep ahead of the next guy; maintain power and lord over them.

Good thing for us the Kingdom of God looks at creation, including each one of us, differently!

Theologian and author Walter Wink points out in his book Engaging the Powers, that “Jesus does not condemn ambition or aspiration; he merely changes the values to which they are attached. He does not reject power, but only its use to dominate others.”

So, what exactly does that mean? It means that Jesus is calling us through his life and ministry to follow in his footsteps. Jesus did NOT seek out power and prestige. In fact, he often performed miracles in small groups of people and instructed them NOT to tell others.

When Jesus was put in the spotlight he did not *toot his own horn* or boast about his accomplishments. Instead he used those opportunities to share about God’s love and invite others into God’s Kingdom. Jesus turned the attention toward those most in need, toward those people the rest of society would look beyond and ignore.

Do you think you get it now?

Theologian David Lose explains that “Jesus continually points out to the disciples, and now to us, that there is no escaping service. You will either willingly, even joyfully, serve others, or you will become a slave to your illusions that you can be free and secure your future through status and power.”

The question becomes, “not will you serve?” but “Who will you serve?” for as *Bob Dylan reminds us*:

*You're gonna have to serve somebody,
It may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.*

If we are going to change our focus from serving ourselves to using our power for good and serving God by serving others, what will that look like? I believe we can break it down into 4 easy to follow steps:

1. Identify a person or community in need.
2. Assess the gifts and strengths we have for addressing that need.
3. Invite others to join in our effort.
4. As stated by Mahatma Gandhi, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

An example of these steps in action:

1. (Identify a person or community in need) My dear friends Sandy and Eleanor were watching the news one night where they live in Chicago. There was a story about a police officer who had been killed and the effort that was under way to fine his killers. There were people working around the clock. **The need they identified: the people serving appeared in need of comfort and rest in the midst of tragedy and exhausting work.**
2. (Assess the gifts and strengths you have for addressing that need) Sandy and Eleanor are both gifted with a love for cooking and the ability to make delicious food. **They decided to use these gifts and abilities to prepare a home-cooked meal of Sloppy Joes for the men and women who were working so hard.**
3. (Invite others to join in your effort) Sandy went to a local grocery store and asked them to donate food to their effort. **The store donated cans of chili for the sloppy joes and buns for the sandwiches.**
4. (“Be the change you wish to see in the world.”) **Sandy and Eleanor drove about 2 hours to deliver over 10 pounds of sloppy Joes to the community!**

Serving does not have to be great as the world understands great. Our service does not have to be big;

it has to be sincere and offered willingly. Jesus asks that we serve others with love and compassion. There are many examples of faithful service here in our own church community, such as making pillowcases for refugees, collecting food and supplies for local food pantries, forging relationships and working together with our Muslim brothers and sisters to offer fresh produce in underprivileged neighborhoods, and these only scratch the surface of what we as a congregation already do.

How about serving others in our everyday lives? You and I have an advantage over the disciples. We have already witnessed the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We have no excuses for continuing to serve our own self interests. Imagine if everywhere we went we saw through the eyes of Jesus and responded as Jesus' hands. Imagine if we were to put Jesus between ourselves and the people we meet as a filter for our hearts and our words. Imagine if we accepted this call to serve others as a GIFT and as a way of saying THANK YOU to God for the life-saving gift of Christ's life and death suffered for us.

'You're gonna have to serve somebody,
It may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.'

So I invite you to let go of your own personal Garden of Eden, and remember that being a disciple of Christ

does not mean we have special privileges to 'lord over others with,' but that we have special work to do. After all, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many," and we are called to do the same. Perhaps when we do this God will stop shaking God's head at our not understanding and instead, SMILE.

Amen.