

We are all called to be servant leaders.

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Mark 10:35-45

All of the teachings from Jesus over the past several weeks have been set in the context of his traveling towards Jerusalem. Last week's passage begins with the rich man running up to him to ask about how he can inherit eternal life as Jesus is setting out on the journey for the day. In the paragraph between last week's and today's reading, Jesus has just told his disciples for the third time that he is going to be crucified in Jerusalem. Now on the road to Jerusalem it's as if they haven't heard anything about the struggle that is to come and are asking about their position in the kingdom.

This rather remarkable story is one that is preserved in all three synoptic gospels which probably means there is a good chance that this event really occurred and that the disciples really did embarrass themselves with this fighting over who gets the honored place in the kingdom. Remember this was not witnessed by the world as many of the miracles were. This is a story that had to be told by the disciples about themselves. This is a moment where we get a look at the disciples as they really were, which is totally and completely human, creatures of their time and culture.

The disciples are hung up on status and for their world this is not surprising. Jesus actually spends a lot of time talking about status and positions of power precisely because this was important in the first century world both inside the church and in the public world. This was an honor shame society and status was everything. This is one of the reasons that Jesus' preferential treatment of the poor, the outsider, the sick, would have been so shocking to those in the positions of power. Remember this is a world that believed those who suffered or had disasters happen to them had somehow offended God and those who were righteous were rewarded.

Who sat where at a banquet was incredibly important and Jesus speaks of this in several different teachings. We don't have anything quite like that in today's everyday world anymore other than possibly in diplomatic dinners or negotiations.

One commentary wondered if the first time people in the early church heard this they laughed at the absurdity of this story. Another possibility is that they heard this and thought of people in their church who came to mind when they heard this passage. Maybe the laughter was nervous laughter when they recognized their own behaviors in this passage. For all of us this can be an important moment of self-examination.

One thing is certain. We need to realize we all have some Zebedee genes in our makeup. Like James and John we all desire accolades, praise, respect. Just like with the rich man the question is does this motivate us, drive us, or control our actions? This is the problem with the request of James and John, which is all about them and not

about being the servant. They have already forgotten Jesus' statement that in the kingdom many who are first will be last and the last will be first. And it is not just James and John because the other disciples get upset that they have asked this and maybe some of that upset is that they realize that they did not think to make the same request.

What Thomas Merton or Richard Rohr would say about this passage is that James, John and all the disciples are operating out of their ego self, not their God centered self. In fact I'm not sure if they ever figured out their God centered self until sometime after the resurrection. This is still a learning stage for the disciples and must have been very frustrating for Jesus. That they have not quite grasped what is going on should be clear since this is the third time Jesus has told them what is going to happen and they say they want to share in this cup and this baptism. Obviously they really haven't been listening or at least at a point where they can really understand.

Ultimately this is gospel passage is a lesson in Servant Leadership. Leading from the standpoint of a servant is very countercultural both then and today! I sincerely believe that this is in large part what is behind the fascination with the leadership style of Pope Francis. Here is servant leadership. I believe it is also what will mark the leadership of our new Presiding Bishop Michael Curry.

I was at Virginia Seminary this week for the consecration of the new chapel that was built to replace the one that burned to the ground in 2010. Present were three Presiding Bishops, Frank Griswold the previous PB, Katherine our current PB, Michael the PB elect and the Archbishop of Canterbury. What give me hope is that they all came across as ordinary people. Justin the Archbishop doesn't even wear a purple shirt. He walked right past me at one point in the morning and I had to do a double take because he looked just like any of the many priests in attendance. No entourage, no handler just his assistant from Lambeth Palace. There is a wonderful story about him complaining how hard it is to get take away delivered to his residence at Lambeth Palace, but that's a story for another day.

Servant leadership is what we are all called to do. Some of you may remember doing the training in this using the book by Bishop Simms. Being the servant with our egos crying out for recognition is hard, but not impossible. Listen to the famous prayer by St. Francis from our prayer book for in this prayer is the way to live the servant life.

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

This is the essence of servant ministry. We have many servants in this parish. To be honest it is the only way we can exist as a parish. We need all those people who see an issue and take care of it often anonymously. "Oh that's broken" and within a day what

ever is broken has been replaced and many times nobody knows except Nancy and I. These people like it that way. Or they volunteer and do incredible work and say I don't really want recognition and they mean it, but they go out of their way to thank everyone who helps them. Or they say I will take the lead in helping us meet a financial goal, but I do not want my name attached to this. This is not false modesty this is servant ministry. As a parish we really are pretty good at this, but we need to recognize it for what it is.

We also need to realize that we are all called to servant ministry here at our parish and in the greater world. So go today, be instruments of God's peace, sow love, sow hope, be the light, the beacon, spread joy, love without restraint. Live the prayer of St. Francis every where all the time. That is our call as servants leaders. Be the servant that Christ is calling you to be.