

True Greatness ... Jesus Style

Sermon for Sunday, August 15, 2010
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Mark 9:30-35; 10:42-45

Last week, I preached on how vital it is for the Church to live as a Body: One unit, living in harmony, yet made up of many different members. Let's continue on from there.

As I talked with the children, we see that Jesus' disciples didn't quite have that attitude. They may have accepted the idea that each one of them was important in the new church Jesus was building; but each one thought that *his* role was the most important.

"When Jesus gets to be king, I'll be his favourite."

"You will not!"

"Will too!"

How did Jesus respond to this petty, childish bickering?

Mark 9:33-35, Today's English Version:
They came to Capernaum, and after going indoors Jesus asked his disciples, "What were you arguing about on the road?"

But they would not answer him, because on the road they had been arguing among themselves about who was the greatest. Jesus sat down, called the twelve disciples, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all."

If you will allow me to paraphrase Jesus' words, he is telling us, "If you are ambitious, if you want to become someone great and important, then be a servant."

In the very next chapter of Mark, we read more on this:

Mark 10:42-45, Today's English Version:
So Jesus called them all together to him and said, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the heathen have power over them, and the leaders have complete authority. This, however, is not the way it is among you. If one of you wants to be great, you must be the servant of the rest; and if one of you wants to be first, you must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people."

Let's look at that: "If one of you wants to be great." I wonder how many of you here, your ambition is to get a

D-minus in life. You don't really want to accomplish anything in life, just scrape by. You don't care about anyone else in the world, and as for yourself: as long as you've got a few rags to wear, and a bridge where you can get out of the rain to sleep at night, you're content.

I don't think so. Wouldn't you rather be great? Now being great doesn't mean that you're great-*er* or the great-*est*. It just means that your life has a purpose; you did something significant and meaningful with your life. People are glad that you lived.

Jesus says, "If you want to be great, be a servant."

Jesus not only tells us to be servants. He shows us how. He demonstrates with his own life what he wants his followers to do.

Let's compare Jesus with Pilate, to learn about being a servant.

	Pilate	Jesus
Goals	Boss people around to get what you want. Use them around like tools. • ME-CENTRED	People <i>are</i> what you want, so you treat each one as special. • PEOPLE-CENTRED.
People	Use the law, threats, money, violence — anything that will work — to get people to do what you want. • POWER, CONTROL	Love people just as they are — thief, prostitute, tax collector, adulterer — and <i>invite</i> them to follow you. • ACCEPTANCE & LOVE
Status	If a job — like murder — is too dirty to do yourself, order someone else to do it. • PRESTIGE	Do the jobs no one else wants, like washing dirty feet. Love the people no one else wants. • HUMILITY
Values	Above all, look out for yourself. You're Number One, and everyone knows it. • ME FIRST	Above all, love God and others. God is Number One, and everything is based on that. • GOD FIRST

Here's another example of what a servant look like in action, from Elisabeth Elliot's book *The Mark of a Man*. She told of a relative who was the dean of a Christian college.

One night some boys in a dorm had been rowdy, smearing the walls with shaving cream, peanut butter, and jelly. When the dean heard about it, he wondered what action he should take. He could force the young men to clean it up, or he could order the janitor to do it.

Instead, he proceeded to clean up the mess himself. Soon doors began to open, and before long the guilty ones were helping him wash the walls. Because he was willing to take the role of a servant, he solved the problem and taught the boys a valuable lesson at the same time.

Our society is possessed by the idea of being the first, the biggest, the best. It's an addiction. It's a struggle based on control. Jesus tells us to let go of that need for more.

But it's hard. So much of our world is based on competition: sports, business. Even churches compete with one another for people.

Jesus gives the disciples an illustration of how a servant works. He brought a child into the group, hugging him in his arms. He said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me..." [Mark 9:37].

I think this refers to more than just children. I think he's talking about all the "little ones" in our world, all the people who don't count, who get overlooked: the poor, the trouble-makers, the ones nobody likes, the young, the elderly, the handicapped, and so on.

I believe Jesus Christ calls all people to be part of his church. But judging from the people he spent time with, I also believe he specially welcomes the people of our society whom no one else wants.

Here's one idea of how you can be a servant this week: Think of someone who fits the description I've been painting. Someone you know, someone in your neighbourhood. Maybe you normally avoid that type of person.

Remembering Jesus' example of a servant, go out of your way to see that person this week. Ask how they are. See if they need any help. Welcome them to church; offer to pick them up, and bring them with you.

Many times we say, "If I could have been there with Jesus in person...!" Listen again: "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me."

Did you catch that last bit? You *can* be with Jesus in person, this very week! It happens when we serve others.

Theme for today: I marvel at the thick-headedness of Jesus' disciples. At the Last Supper, he told them how he would sacrifice his body and blood to redeem people from their sins. The response of the disciples? Bickering among themselves, "Jesus likes me better than you." *Unbelievable!* [Really! Read this in Luke 22:14-27.]

Yet the truth is that in the Kingdom of God, we are all slow learners — that is, if we say "You haven't learned it until you do it." If we did only half of what we know God wants from us, the world would be shaken.