

Mark 10: 35-45

DON'T YOU LOVE HOW *EVERYBODY* WANTS TO ASK JESUS A QUESTION?! QUESTIONS LIKE: "HEY, JESUS! IS IT OK TO GET A DIVORCE?" "HEY, JESUS! WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO HAVE ETERNAL LIFE?" "HEY, JESUS, HOW COME WE COULDN'T CAST OUT THAT DEMON LIKE YOU DID?" "HEY, JESUS! WHEN YOU'RE SITTING UP THERE ON THE GLORIOUS THRONE, CAN MY BROTHER AND I HAVE DIBS ON THE CHAIRS TO YOUR LEFT AND RIGHT?"

THERE'S A SAYING, "ASK A SILLY QUESTION, GET A SILLY ANSWER." JESUS REPLIES, YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE ASKING." YOU HAVE *NO IDEA* WHAT YOU'RE ASKING.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW TELLS THIS ENCOUNTER DIFFERENTLY; PERHAPS A BIT UNCOMFORTABLE WITH JAMES AND JOHN, SO MATTHEW HAS THEIR MOTHER MAKE THE REQUEST FOR THEM..BLAME THE PUSHY MOTHER. LUKE'S GOSPEL GLOSSES OVER THE ENTIRE INCIDENT, CALLING IT SIMPLY A "DISPUTE" OVER WHICH ONE OF THE DISCIPLES WOULD BE THE GREATEST.

JAMES AND JOHN'S QUESTION SEEMS TO COME OUT OF LEFT FIELD, YET JUST A FEW VERSES PRIOR SEVERAL DISCIPLES WERE ASKING JESUS ABOUT THE "WARRANTY" ON ALL THIS. "JESUS, WHO CAN BE SAVED, ANYWAY? WE'VE LEFT EVERYTHING TO FOLLOW YOU, REMEMBER? IS THERE SOME KIND OF GUARANTEE THAT YOU'LL REMEMBER US?"

BEFORE WE SCOLD THE DISCIPLES TOO MUCH, OR SNICKER AT THEIR RUDENESS, WE SHOULD CONSIDER WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE IF WE OURSELVES WERE IN THEIR POSITION. YOU'VE TAKEN THE RISK, LEFT FAMILY AND SECURITY BEHIND, WORKED ON THE CAMPAIGN, AND YOU SIMPLY WANT TO KNOW WHAT THE RETURN ON YOUR INVESTMENT WILL BE.

OR, MAYBE JUST THAT ALL YOUR HARD WORK WILL PAY OFF AND THERE WILL BE A PROMOTION, SOME RECOGNITION THAT YOU'VE MADE IT. YOU'RE READY TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED AS THE EXPERT, A LEADER, A SOMEBODY.

BACK IN THE 60'S AND 70'S REV. CHARLIE SHEDD WAS NOTED FOR HIS WRITINGS RELATED TO FAMILY AND PARENTING ISSUES. HE WROTE THE WELL-KNOWN BOOKS, *LETTERS TO KAREN* AND *LETTERS TO PHILIP*. BOOKS OF REFLECTIONS ABOUT LIFE AND FAITH WRITTEN TO HIS OWN CHILDREN. SHEDD BEGINS ONE OF HIS LATER BOOKS THIS WAY: "HOW TO RAISE YOUR CHILDREN" ...THIS WAS TRULY THE TITLE OF ONE OF MY FINEST EFFORTS. LIKE ALL GOOD SPEECHES IT HAD UNITY, ORDER, MOVEMENT. IT *ELECTRIFIED*, EDIFIED, SPECIFIED. IT GRABBED THEM QUICK AND HELD THEM FAST WITH HUMOR AND DRAMA. ALL OVER THE MIDWEST I GAVE SPEECHES WITH THE SAME TITLE. THEY PAID ME A HANDSOME FEE AND WERE GLAD TO HAVE ME. "THIS GUY WILL WOW YOU!" THAT'S WHAT THEY SAID, AND PEOPLE CAME IN DROVES. WITH HIGH HOPES, THEY CAME FOR "HOW TO RAISE YOUR CHILDREN."

THEN MY WIFE AND I HAD A CHILD. AFTER THAT MY MAJESTIC SPEECH WAS TOTALED. THOSE BRILLIANT IDEAS HAD SUCH A DROLL SOUND AT 2:00 AM WITH OUR BABY IN FULL CRY. IN MY DEFENSE, I KEPT TRYING. I CHANGED MY TITLE TO "SOME SUGGESTIONS TO PARENTS," AND CHARGED BRAVELY ON. THEN WE HAD TWO MORE CHILDREN AND I

ALTERED IT AGAIN. THIS TIME THE TITLE CAME OUT “FEEBLE HINTS TO FELLOW STRUGGLERS.”

WHO AMONG US DOESN'T WANT TO BE THE EXPERT? OR AT LEAST FEEL, AT TIME, LIKE WE HAVE THE INSIDE TRACK? TO SEE A RETURN ON OUR INVESTMENT—TO KNOW THE PERSON OR THE CAUSE WE'VE CHAMPIONED IS THE *BEST* ONE, WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE, WILL COME OUT OKAY IN THE END. THAT *WE* WILL HAVE SOME SORT OF ASSURANCE OR AT LEAST A ROLE TO PLAY IN THE NEXT CHAPTER? THAT OUR EFFORTS WILL COME TO FRUITION IN SOME VISIBLE WAY? JAMES AND JOHN ARE THINKING THAT THE NEW WORLD, WHERE JESUS REIGNS IN GLORY, WILL BE SET UP JUST LIKE THE OLD WORLD, ONLY WITH NEW LEADERSHIP IN PLACE. THEIR LEADERSHIP WITH THEIR EXPERTISE. THE BAD GUYS AT THE HEAD OF THE TABLE WILL BE REMOVED AND GOD'S NEW CREW WILL BE SEATED, WITH JESUS IN THE NUMBER ONE POSITION AND THE MOST LOYAL MEMBERS OF HIS STAFF ON EITHER SIDE OF HIM. ONCE THIS CHANGE HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED, THEN—FINALLY! AT LAST! ALL THE GOOD PEOPLE WILL COMMENCE TO REDEEM THE WORLD. OF COURSE JAMES AND JOHN WANT TO BE A PART OF THAT! WHO WOULDN'T WANT TO BE A PART OF THAT?

“YOU'VE GOT IT ALL WRONG,” JESUS TELLS THE DISCIPLES. I AM NOT HERE SIMPLY TO REPLACE THOSE IN POWER. I AM HERE TO TURN THE POWER STRUCTURE UPSIDE DOWN. WHOEVER WISHES TO BECOME GREAT AMONG YOU MUST BE YOUR SERVANT. THE SON OF MAN CAME NOT TO BE SERVED, BUT TO SERVE. YOU WANT TO BE IN GLORY WITH ME? WE WON'T BE SITTING AT THE HEAD OF THE TABLE READY FOR FINE DINING. WE WILL BE BUSSING THE PLATES AND REPLACING THE SILVERWARE AND PREPARING THE FOOD AND CLEANING THE SPILLS. PERHAPS THE DISCIPLES DON'T QUITE UNDERSTAND THE LIFE TO WHICH THEY ARE AGREEING. A LIFE OF SERVICE AND SERVANTHOOD.

WE HAVE ALL HEARD THIS TEACHING SO MANY TIMES THAT IT IS ALL BUT LOST ON US. THE END OF THE LINE *IS* THE *BEST* PLACE TO BE. THE LOWLIEST JOB IS THE ONE YOU WANT. THOSE WHO SERVE ARE LUCKIER THAN THOSE IN POWER AND LOVERS OF GOD GET *LESS* STATUS, NOT MORE.

IT REALLY IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE IN TERMS OF THE WORLD WE LIVE IN. THINGS SIMPLY DO NOT WORK THAT WAY...NO MATTER HOW OLD YOU ARE...YOU KNOW THINGS DON'T WORK THAT WAY. BEING FIRST IS THE ONLY WAY.

THE FIRST DAY OF KINDERGARTEN THE TEACHER EXPLAINED THAT WHEN IT WAS A STUDENT'S BIRTHDAY, THAT STUDENT WOULD BE THE TEACHER'S HELPER FOR THE DAY. THEY WOULD BE FIRST IN LINE, EVERY LINE...TO GO OUTSIDE FOR RECESS AND TO COME BACK IN, FIRST FOR SNACK, FIRST IN LINE TO GET A DRINK AND THEY WOULD GET TO SIT UP FRONT RIGHT BY THE TEACHER BUT BEST OF ALL, THEY WOULD ADORN A BEAUTIFUL BIRTHDAY CROWN WITH THEIR NAME AND AGE PROUDLY DISPLAYED. AFTER EXPLAINING HOW BIRTHDAYS WORKED IN KINDERGARTEN, THE TEACHER ASKED IF ANYONE HAD A BIRTHDAY ON THAT DAY, THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL. ONE LITTLE GIRL PROUDLY RAISED HER HAND AND SOON SHE WAS WEARING AN ORANGE CROWN WITH A BIG NUMBER 6 ON IT

AND SHE WAS FIRST IN LINE TO GO OUT FOR RECESS AND THE FIRST TO COME BACK INSIDE. HOWEVER AFTER THE FIRST MORNING RECESS THE TEACHER CALLED THE CHILD TO HER DESK, SOFTLY REMINDING LITTLE TERI IT WASN'T HER BIRTHDAY THAT DAY AND SHE WOULD HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL MARCH TO BE THE LEADER.

LITTLE TERI KNEW FULLY WELL HER BIRTHDAY WASN'T IN SEPTEMBER BUT THE TEMPTATION OF BEING FIRST IN EVERY POSSIBLE WAY WAS TOO MUCH!

IT DOESN'T WORK THAT WAY, JESUS TELLS THE DISCIPLES. THERE IS, ULTIMATELY, NO SUCH THING AS THE RIGHT AND LEFT HAND OF GOD. THERE IS NO PEcking ORDER IN THE CHURCH. OR THERE SHOULDN'T BE. EVERYONE IS ON THE SAME LEVEL...THAT OF SERVANT. NO ONE HAS GOD'S EAR ANYMORE THAN ANYONE ELSE.

INSTEAD OF DRAWING LINES, WE SHOULD BE DRAWING ONE HUGE CIRCLE. NO LEFT OR RIGHT AT ALL. AND INSIDE THE CIRCLE, TOUCHING EACH AND EVERY PERSON, IS JESUS, SHARING THE COST AND JOY OF HIS CUP AND BAPTISM WITH US.

"YOU'RE ALL PARTNERS...PARTNERS IN SERVICE," JESUS TELLS THEM. NOT SITTING NEXT TO GOD, BENDING GOD'S EAR, OR SPEAKING FOR GOD. YOU ARE CALLED ONLY TO SERVE AND TO GIVE YOUR LIFE FOR MANY. JESUS IS SAYING:

IF YOU OWN YOUR OWN COMPANY...SERVE SOMEBODY. IF YOU FARM...SERVE SOMEBODY. IF YOU TEACH...SERVE SOMEBODY.

IF YOU WORK FOR SOMEONE ELSE...SERVE SOMEBODY.

IF YOU ARE RETIRED...SERVE SOMEBODY. IF YOU ARE A STUDENT...SERVE SOMEBODY. IF YOU ARE WEALTHY..SERVE SOMEBODY. IF YOU DON'T HAVE TWO DIMES TO RUB TOGETHER..SERVE SOMEBODY.

I AM GUESSING MOST OF US ARE NOT FULLY LIVING INTO JESUS' CALL TO SERVANTHOOD. I KNOW I'M NOT. THE GOSPEL NUDGES US TO CONSIDER HOW WE MIGHT LEAD BY SERVING IN OUR CORNER OF THE WORLD. HOW WE MIGHT, THIS COMING WEEK, MAKE A SPECIFIC CHOICE TO FOLLOW JESUS' CALL TO SERVE. A POEM BY ANDREW KING CAPTURES THE MESSAGE:

IS THAT YOU, LORD, CHANGING THE DIAPER IN THE NURSING HOME, HOLDING THE SPOON FOR THE WOMAN IN THE WHEELCHAIR, WIPING DOWN THE TOILET AND FLOOR;

IS THAT YOU, LORD, SERVING THE MEAL AT THE HARVEST TABLE, SORTING CANS AT THE FOOD PANTRY, RAKING LEAVES FOR THE ELDERLY NEIGHBOR; IS THAT YOU, LORD, DRIVING THE PATIENT TO THE TREATMENT CENTER, SITTING THROUGH THE NIGHT WITH THE FAMILY, MAKING THE CALL TO THE FORGOTTEN FRIEND.

IS THAT YOU, LORD, LIGHTING THE CANDLE IN THE DARKNESS, KEEPING VIGIL FOR COMPASSION AND JUSTICE, LOVING IN US AND THROUGH US AND WITH US UNTIL THE WORLD YOU LOVE HAS BEEN CHANGED? IS THAT YOU LORD? LET US PRAY: GOD, WE KNOW THAT SERVING OTHERS ISN'T ALWAYS EASY. IT REQUIRES SACRIFICE, HUMILITY, AND A WILLINGNESS TO PUT OTHER FIRST. BUT WE ALSO KNOW THAT WHEN WE SERVE OTHERS,

WE BECOME MORE LIKE YOUR SON JESUS AND EXPERIENCE THE JOY AND FULFILLMENT THAT COMES FROM SERVING AND HONORING HIM. AMEN.