

Sunday October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009 – Ladner United Church  
 0900 and 1100hrs Service  
 Preacher JIM SHORT

**Mark 10:35-45**

10:35 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."

10:36 And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?"

10:37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

10:38 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?"

10:39 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;

10:40 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."

10:41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John.

10:42 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.

10:43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,

10:44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

10:45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

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We don't have very high expectations of leadership in the modern world in terms of leaders being anything but self serving...

whether its this week's photo of the MP from the East Coast – handing over tax payer's money - \$300,002 to a local community for a skating rink – the large signboard sized cheque for the photo op having his political parties logo on it and signed by him...

or whether it's the incredibly large number of British Members of Parliament forced to pay back thousands of pounds of money they used for personnel expenses...

whether its Olympic Tickets bought by tax payer's money for politicians...or religious leaders using offering plate money for grandiose lifestyles – some of us remember the infamous Baker family and the television empire – Praise the Lord...

almost without batting an eye and with a sigh – here it goes again – we know that you may start out with the noblest of human ambitions – to make life better for others but in all kinds of institutions...

government, commerce, industry, banking, education, politics, religion – somehow the power of self service creeps in...

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Such is Jesus's conversation with the James, John and the ten other disciples and followers of Jesus – his inner circle...his posse...

Let's hear the story again from Eugene Peterson's paraphrase *The Message*: (Mark 10:35-45)

James and John, Zebedee's sons, came up to him, "Teacher, we have something we want you to do for us."

"What is it? I'll see what I can do."

"Arrange it" they said "so that we will be awarded the highest places of honor in your glory – one of us at your right, the other at your left."

Jesus said, "You have no idea what you're asking. Are you capable of drinking the cup I drink, of being baptized in the baptism I'm about to be plunged into."

"Sure" they said "Why not?"

Jesus said "Come to think of it, you will drink the cup I drink, and be baptized in my baptism. But as to awarding places of honor, that's not my business. There are other arrangements for that."

When the other ten heard of this conversation, they lost their tempers with James and John. Jesus got them together to settle things down: "You've observed how godless rulers throw their weight around." he said, "and when people get a little power how quickly it goes to their heads. It's not going to be that way with you." Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Who ever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served – and then to give away his life in exchange for the many who are held hostage."

This episode in the life of Jesus and the disciples come right after the third time that Jesus has spoken to his disciples about his upcoming death...at the hands of the authorities...

James and John have missed something...

There are two things we have to acknowledge that we can't fault them for:

They know Jesus is ultimately going to win the victory – their question is framed with – not "if" you get to your glory but "when"...

and secondly they have ambition – they can look into the future and imagine something for themselves – and we'd never want to fault ambition..."ambition is the fuel to the heart" and one has to have some

level of ambition to achieve anything in this world...and we'd never want to discourage anyone – child, teen or adult not to have some level of ambition...

No the problem is the reward they are seeking – they have missed a crucial part of what Jesus has both said and will eventually model in his death for them...

They believe that what Jesus wants to do is simply replace the old self serving power of Rome and the temple authorities with them...

now like any Jewish person of that time – James and John, having grown up on the great stories of the Hebrew Scriptures – would have dreamt passionately about the time when the New King David would come back – the Messiah – with his sword and white charger and throw off the yoke of Roman Oppression and free the people from this new Pharaoh Rome and make Israel again a great nation...

and they would be well versed and angry about the oppressive yoke of the Roman Empire on the backs of the Jews...

taxes and exploitation – a very few at the top of the pyramid profiting off the grinding poverty of the many...

(Side bar – Whole People of God – Another Kind of Greatness p 76 Congregational Life Pentecost 2)

#### Power in Jesus's World

- 1) A Class based society in which the urban ruling elite of no more than 2% of the population held all the power, wealth and status while 90% of the population were a rural based peasant class. The other 8% were a small retainer class of priests, government servants, scribes and military.
- 2) Economic exploitation meant that two thirds of the annual production of wealth ended up in the hands of the ruling elite through taxation on agriculture and land ownership.
- 3) 80% lived a life of unremitting labour, borderline nourishment, high infant mortality and radically lower life expectancy.
- 4) The majority had no voice in the structure of government and society.
- 5) The Religion of the elites affirmed that the oppressive structure of society were ordained by God giving it a religious legitimation)

they think its simply going to be changing the deck chairs the the top...when Jesus you sit on the throne – let us be the chosen ones to sit on your left and right...

so that we might be rewarded for our efforts...

“Teacher, we have something we want you to do for us?”

Things haven't changed much, have they...

We know that the first call upon us in life is to look after ourselves...and if we look after ourselves and both our short term and long terms interests...

then we secure for ourselves a life...and then secondarily – if there's time and resources – it's a good thing to do things for others...

“What is in it for me?”

“What’s my cut and my share?”

“What do I get in return for what I am willing to do?”

That’s the way of life- that’s survival of the fittest – that’s me first – and think about it – if the government did not reimburse us with a tax deduction for charitable givings in Canada – would our charitable givings be what they are?”

“What is in it for me?”

and then Jesus says – can you drink the cup that I will drink and be baptized with the baptism I am being baptized with...

why sure, they say...

well come to think of it – Jesus says – you will acutally have to that – but as to the places of honor as to what is in it for you...well there are other arrangements...

and then – the 10 other disciples hear about this – lose their temper because James and John have one upped them and got their request in first for the positions of glory...  
and Jesus has to calm the group down...

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Jesus knows – that even for those who follow him – that our human ambition to achieve can easily be seduced to the dark side of selfihsness  
and climbing to the top of the heap on the lives and backs of others...

so Jesus  
speaks of another path...

the path of servant hood – the term is diakonia – the servant in the home of a rich person in Jesus’s day whose job was to wait upon the family table...

of freely choosing to take up the role of the servant and to put other’s first

is really the path to glory in God’s Community...

the disciples are going to get there – they will drink the cup and be baptized in the water Jesus will...  
but the “reward” will not be sitting at the right and left hand of Jesus in this world...i

diakonia came over the first few centuries of the early Christian Church to be the most common terms for “ministry” in the church  
whether it was exercise by full time people like myself or lay members like yourselves...

service to others...

At our South Delta Ministerial last Thursday – we were talking about how do people perceive the churches of our community in a post Christian world...

think about how Christians are generally perceived in our Western culture...

You will hear words like:

self serving

corrupt and inept leadership

more concerned with people giving money and their buildings

intolerant

Holier than thou

fixated on correct and moral behaviour

don't listen well

beating people up with their vision of Jesus and telling them how and what to believe

black and white

judgemental...

and then we said:

what has happened that we who follow Jesus who came to serve...and we who believe are mission is to serve the community...

got this kind of reputation...

especially when our primary sacrament - Communion models service...

the table is set

its Jesus' table - all are welcome

You are served by elder's and leaders who are served their bread and wine by me and then I am served last...

and then we say - go out into the world and do likewise...

Kenneth L Carder The Call to Downward Mobility - The Christian Century - October 8, 1997

"Everybody wants to be somebody. Since the dawn of history, human beings have been trying to move up the scale of importance. The clinger used by the serpent to tempt Adam and Eve was "when you eat of the tree of good and evil, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. (Genesis 3:5) Henri Nouwen says that ever since then, we have been tempted to replace love with power. "The long painful history of the church is the history of people ever and again tempted to choose power over love, control over the cross, being a leader over being led." This is the theme running through the bible, throughout human history and throughout our human psyche."

so when Jesus through his death and resurrection

rescues

us from sin, brokenness, death, and the demonic powers that enslave the world...

and gives us new life...Marks says Jesus' death is a ransom (in greek lytron) which indicates that his death does something...it secures a release... its not a payment – but it frees us...a liberation brought from divine strength....(Mark Skinner)

Jesus frees us to...(pause)

not sit at the right hand and left hand of his glory...

but rather he frees us to get down into the muck and crap of human brokenness and misery and become willingly and freely servants and slaves...

When people talk about Jesus...and the Christian life and all the wonderful things he has done for them...

all the blessings ....that's upward mobility...

but in reality...Jesus calls us to embrace willingly downward mobility...

the biblical scholar Marcus Borg says that the transofmraiton Jesus offers you and I is to die to the self as the center of our concern...and the world as the center of our security and identity...you have to die to it – because it has such a pull and power over us – filling up constanlty those ego needs – well there's never enough – but if you let it go and die to them and trust in God...God will raise you through Jesus...

to a new way of life...

and it was that cup, that baptism, that cross, that resurrection that Jesus told the disicples they were about to embark upon...

and that's freely embarked upon (so that to use these texts as the church has sometimes down to endorse slavery or the subjection and servitude of women is a violation to the heart of the gospel" (Kate Huey)

embracing downward mobility...

lots of Christians want (Bishop Michel Marshall) "decaffeinated Christianity" the kind of religion that won't keep you awake at night. This kind of religion that costs little, won't require you to get involved in other people's troubles and will surround you with comfort but that's why we got the image in the world we have...

poor marketing...

Christianity with lots of caffiene – gonna keep you awake is what Jesus offers...

"Getting right with God by coming to Jesus is not simply a basic factor in an orderly and good life. Discipleship will mean more trouble, not less. Though it may be palliative in some respects, following

Jesus is likely to be disruptive in others. True discipleship is characterized by a costly pouring out of one's life for another, whether it be an aging parent, a struggling friend, a special child, another member of the Christian church who has unusual needs, a neighbour or any person whose situation elicits neighbourly service at a personal cost. Jesus came to serve." (Lamar Williamson)

or (Leonard Sweet) being last

the last to leave the side of a sick bed  
 the last to let a grieving spouse sit alone  
 the last to write off the children whose parents have failed them or thrown them away  
 the last to ignore the homeless camped out along our streets  
 the last to allow hunger to gnaw at the bellies of our neighbours  
 the last to shrug our shoulders at ongoing environmental degradation  
 the last to let despair grind down the powerless  
 the last to condone cruelty of any kind to any living thing  
 the last to let human hatred triumph over divine love.

we tasted that yesterday – the six of us who went to Gleaners...

an organization that dehydrates vegetables and fruits – either donated, gleaned from the fields or don't look right for the supermarket world of North Americans who demand perfectly shaped tomatoes and peppers...

packages that and sends it around the world to feed the almost one billion (1/6ths of the world's population) who are hungry...

no one gets paid  
 everything is donated  
 when you arrive there to volunteer – no one asks whose the minister, who chairs the board etc..  
 no one worries about qualifications and age and status or secular occupation  
 you just work...here's what needs to be done – take a scraper – scrape off the dehydrated food into barrels, here's cloth for tray washing, a knife to cut up vegetables and fruits,

we're here simply to serve others...

and 6 of us – working three hours each – produced 2500 servings of soup (and to make it even more servant oriented – we did onions)

all six of us could have done all kinds of other activities or things – there was nothing in it for us...

and it felt so satisfying...

servant hood – diakonia...

reaching out and serving – the least the lost and the lonely – finding Christ out there...

Jesus said to James and John – I can't fulfill your fantasies of upward mobility, wealth, power, prestige and status...

but I can offer you life...through service....set your intention and your energy to downward mobility...

(0900 video)

1100hrs – Martin Luther King’s sermon) The Drum Major Instinct...

But that isn’t what Jesus did; he did something altogether different. He said in substance, “Oh, I see, you want to be first. You want to be great. You want to be important. You want to be significant. Well, you ought to be. If you’re going to be my disciple, you must be.” But he reordered priorities. And he said, “Yes, don’t give up this instinct. It’s a good instinct if you use it right. (*Yes*) It’s a good instinct if you don’t distort it and pervert it. Don’t give it up. Keep feeling the need for being important. Keep feeling the need for being first. But I want you to be first in love. (*Amen*) I want you to be first in moral excellence. I want you to be first in generosity. That is what I want you to do.”

And he transformed the situation by giving a new definition of greatness. And you know how he said it? He said, “Now brethren, I can’t give you greatness. And really, I can’t make you first.” This is what Jesus said to James and John. “You must earn it. True greatness comes not by favoritism, but by fitness. And the right hand and the left are not mine to give, they belong to those who are prepared.” (*Amen*)

And so Jesus gave us a new norm of greatness. If you want to be important—wonderful. If you want to be recognized—wonderful. If you want to be great—wonderful. But recognize that he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. (*Amen*) That’s a new definition of greatness.

And this morning, the thing that I like about it: by giving that definition of greatness, it means that everybody can be great, (*Everybody*) because everybody can serve. (*Amen*) You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. (*All right*) You don’t have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don’t have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don’t have to know Einstein’s theory of relativity to serve. You don’t have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. (*Amen*) You only need a heart full of grace, (*Yes, sir, Amen*) a soul generated by love. (*Yes*) And you can be that servant.

I know a man—and I just want to talk about him a minute, and maybe you will discover who I’m talking about as I go down the way (*Yeah*) because he was a great one. And he just went about serving. He was born in an obscure village, (*Yes, sir*) the child of a poor peasant woman. And then he grew up in still another obscure village, where he worked as a carpenter until he was thirty years old. (*Amen*) Then for three years, he just got on his feet, and he was an itinerant preacher. And he went about doing some things. He didn’t have much. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. (*Yes*) He never owned a house. He never went to college. He never visited a big city. He never went two hundred miles from where he was born. He did none of the usual things that the world would associate with greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

He was only thirty-three when the tide of public opinion turned against him. They called him a rabble-rouser. They called him a troublemaker. They said he was an agitator. (*Glory to God*) He practiced civil disobedience; he broke injunctions. And so he was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. And the irony of it all is that his friends turned him over to them. (*Amen*) One of his closest friends denied him. Another of his friends turned him over to his enemies. And while he was

dying, the people who killed him gambled for his clothing, the only possession that he had in the world. (*Lord help him*) When he was dead he was buried in a borrowed tomb, through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen centuries have come and gone and today he stands as the most influential figure that ever entered human history. All of the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned put together (*Yes*) have not affected the life of man on this earth (*Amen*) as much as that one solitary life. His name may be a familiar one. (*Jesus*) But today I can hear them talking about him. Every now and then somebody says, "He's King of Kings." (*Yes*) And again I can hear somebody saying, "He's Lord of Lords." Somewhere else I can hear somebody saying, "In Christ there is no East nor West." (*Yes*) And then they go on and talk about, "In Him there's no North and South, but one great Fellowship of Love throughout the whole wide world." He didn't have anything. (*Amen*) He just went around serving and doing good.

This morning, you can be on his right hand and his left hand if you serve. (*Amen*) It's the only way in.

Every now and then I guess we all think realistically (*Yes, sir*) about that day when we will be victimized with what is life's final common denominator—that something that we call death. We all think about it. And every now and then I think about my own death and I think about my own funeral. And I don't think of it in a morbid sense. And every now and then I ask myself, "What is it that I would want said?" And I leave the word to you this morning.

If any of you are around when I have to meet my day, I don't want a long funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell them not to talk too long. (*Yes*) And every now and then I wonder what I want them to say. Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize—that isn't important. Tell them not to mention that I have three or four hundred other awards—that's not important. Tell them not to mention where I went to school. (*Yes*)

I'd like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to give his life serving others. (*Yes*)

I'd like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to love somebody.

I want you to say that day that I tried to be right on the war question. (*Amen*)

I want you to be able to say that day that I did try to feed the hungry. (*Yes*)

And I want you to be able to say that day that I did try in my life to clothe those who were naked. (*Yes*)

I want you to say on that day that I did try in my life to visit those who were in prison. (*Lord*)

I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity. (*Yes*)

Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice. (*Amen*) Say that I was a drum major for peace. (*Yes*) I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter. (*Yes*) I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind. (*Amen*) And that's all I want to say.

If I can help somebody as I pass along,  
If I can cheer somebody with a word or song,  
If I can show somebody he's traveling wrong,  
Then my living will not be in vain.  
If I can do my duty as a Christian ought,  
If I can bring salvation to a world once wrought,  
If I can spread the message as the master taught,  
Then my living will not be in vain.

Yes, Jesus, I want to be on your right or your left side, (*Yes*) not for any selfish reason. I want to be on your right or your left side, not in terms of some political kingdom or ambition. But I just want to be there in love and in justice and in truth and in commitment to others, so that we can make of this old world a new world.