

Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland

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Follow him in service – Mark 10:32-45

How do you sum up Jesus' ministry? One answer is "he came to serve." Love is shown in service and willingly pays the price.

The gospels show Jesus serving human need wherever it is to be found. However his service was: never grudging but generous, never out of compulsion but voluntarily and never out of weakness but out of strength.

The One who could calm the storm, raise the dead, cleanse the leper, heal the sick, was also the one who reached out to the marginalised, who gave people dignity and pricked the pomposity of the powerful.

This Jesus said to his followers "Follow me." His ultimate service was in laying down his life as a ransom for many. His death was consistent with his life. He went to the cross in the spirit of the cross, serving to the end, holding nothing back. When it comes to service all too often our default setting is to put ourselves before others, and if we don't, it is so exceptional we want others to know all about it! But followers of Jesus follow him in serving.

Jesus was heading for Jerusalem, when, for the third time, he took the disciples aside and warned them that he would be "mocked and flogged and crucified. He would not be caught unawares. He walked into the future, eyes wide open.

But he also knew that death was not the end. On the third day He will be raised to life" though that didn't compute with his followers at any level. Their preferred scenario, the grid that filtered what they allowed themselves to hear, was of Jesus entering the city at the head of a popular uprising and the Romans getting what was coming to them! Jesus would take charge and of course, being his inner circle, they would have key roles when he was crowned as King. So why not take advantage and secure the best seats in advance!

So, in contrast to this pronouncement about what lay ahead, James and John came to Jesus, to ask a favour of Him. "We want you to do for us whatever we ask" "What do you want me

to do for you?” Emboldened they proceed “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.” James and John were interested in glory, position and rank. You could say they wanted three things: Prominence, proximity and power. They wanted to be the closest to Jesus and they wanted to be higher than anyone else. They wanted their will done in their way.

After they have made their request, Jesus responds rather bluntly: “You don’t know what you are asking.” And they didn’t! Isn’t it ironic that on his right and on his left when he was raised up to public view was not James and John but two criminals!

By asking “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” he wanted to know if they knew the cost of love. For the “cup” was, among other things, a symbol of suffering or affliction. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed “Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Naively, James and John answer with complete confidence “We can.” So Jesus takes them at their word. “You will indeed drink from my cup...” They wanted glory but had signed up for suffering. James lost his life as the first of the twelve to be martyred. John lived many years but his life was filled with difficulty, culminating with his banishment to the island of Patmos. It will cost you to serve Christ! Following always comes with a price tag.

The other ten are then brought into the conversation and when they heard that James and John were trying to outflank them by getting their request in first they were indignant.” It was not because of the brothers’ lack of understanding of true servanthood; but that they got to Jesus first!

So with tenderness Jesus called them together, so that they can all learn how differently things are in His kingdom. His is a different way “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.” The world encourages us to get to the top and then display our hard won power at others’ expense- the disciples knew that only too well. Their history was filled with foreign powers and brutal provincial agents who showed little regard for ordinary people.

There is another way though, the way of love “Not so with you...” “...Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.” How radical to define greatness in terms of servanthood.

If his followers wanted to be leaders they first had to become servants. A servant is someone whose heart is set upon pleasing their Master. What he says goes. When the Master moves his finger in command, the servant simply obeys.

Here's the principle: if we want to become truly great then we must give up our personal preferences and serve others. We must think less of rights and more of responsibilities. Our central ambition should be to minister to people, not to be admired by them.

Have you ever noticed how a conversation with Jesus usually turns everything on its head? Here are a few contrasts from the gospels:

- To gain your life, you must lose it
- To experience eternal life, you must have the faith of a child
- To receive, you must first give
- To be great, you must be a servant

In the end what Jesus is asking is that they should follow his example. He offers Himself as the perfect role model. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

This verse has been rightly regarded as one of the most precious of Christ's sayings. Jesus is both our example and our motivation. Here is the choice:-

- power tries to climb, love gets on its knees
- power seeks recognition, love seeks humility

In his most famous quote Jimmy Hendrix the musician who died in 1970 once said, "When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace."

While love without power leads to sympathy, and power without love leads to selfishness, love with power leads to service.

A basin full of water can be used one of two ways when faced with human need. Like Pilate we can wash our hands in it hoping to wash away any responsibility to do anything for others. Or like Jesus, we can use the basin to wash tired and dirty feet. On that night the upper room was filled with proud hearts and dirty feet. The disciples were willing to fight for a throne, but not a towel." But that is not the Jesus' way. "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

The obedience of faith means involvement. It means putting others first, doing something in the spirit of Jesus. "We may easily be too big for God to use, but never too small."

It is the way of Jesus who says to his followers "Follow me" in the way of service. Strangely such service leads to perfect freedom. Why are we surprised?