

Scripture:
Mark 10:35-45

“Obedient submission.”

I can only imagine how Jesus might have felt.

Frustrated ----- discouraged ---- at a loss for words ----- wanting to simply let out a huge exhaling gust of air ----- SIGH.

He has spoken about His own death ----- and the need for humble sacrificial living ----- having servant hearts ---- putting others first --- loving and serving God and loving and serving others as much as we love ourselves.

And 2 of His closest followers ----- James and John respond to all this with --- “Teacher --- we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” ---- “Let us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

Jesus teaches about and lives out --- caring for others ---- serving them ---- putting others first --- and His disciples respond with --- can we please sit in the very best seats right next to you when you are finally on your glorious throne?

SIGH!

Huge exhale.

Frustration ---- disappointment ---- discouragement --- would al be understandable given the circumstances.

Reverent submission ----- and learned obedience --- are what Jesus was all about ----- serving others and following God’s will and His disciples think they’re on to something asking for seats of honour in heaven.

At the turn of the century ---- somewhere between 1949 and 1952 depending on your source a young Canadian Methodist preacher serving a church in Florida --- by the name of J. Wallace Hamilton preached a sermon on Mark 10 35-45 called --- “Drum-major Instincts.”

And a few years later in 1968 ----- February 4th to be exact ----- just a few months before he was assassinated ---- the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. preached a sermon that was largely influenced by Wallace Hamilton's.

And still today their messages ---- their perspective on Mark 10 35-45 remain relevant and influence this message today. It wouldn't be right if I didn't cite them.

Luther King like Wallace Hamilton before him talks about what he calls the "drum major instinct".

And even though parades and marching may not be as prevalent in our society anymore ----- I think the metaphor and reference still helps.

The drum major led the way ----- was first one at the front of the parade -----
- they were the ones with the fancy baton --- and fancy moves.

And so the drum major instinct is the basic human drive to want to stand out in the crowd.

The basic human drive to want to somehow be out in the front leading --- recognized ----- having a visible place of importance.

The drive to be first ----- the drive to be important ----- the drive to be recognized ---- and rewarded even.

These are what mark the drum major instinct ---- and the thought process behind this drum major instinct way of thinking is that we all have a bit of this instinct within us at some point in our lives to varying degrees.

And James and John --- in asking Jesus for seats of recognition ----- are seen as prime examples of this instinct.

And King and Wallace rightly say that Jesus comes and re-orders the drum major instinct.

Instead of our greatness and importance being recognized and defined by where we sit or in the case of the drum major where we march ----- our faithfulness is to be defined by our willingness to serve others.

Greatness is redefined ---- in terms of our willingness and ability to serve.

As Jesus said --- in verse 43 to 45 in Mark's gospel today ----- "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant --- and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all." ----- and ----- "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served --- but to serve..."

So yes --- we can still attach ourselves to that base human desire to be first --
- out front leading the way.

But we must first re-define this drive ----- where our drive is to be first in generosity ---- first in servanthood ----- instead of first in visibility and order of appearance.

And we can still attach ourselves to the human drive to strive for greatness --
-- but only where greatness is determined by the commitment and willingness to serving others.

Greatness in Christ is all about willingness to serve.

And in Christ ----- our desire to be first is a desire to be first in generosity ---
to be the most generous.

A story about a rather interesting man.

Forget about the guy on TV who drinks Dos Equis ---- anyone seen those commercials about the most interesting man in the world ----- well forget about him ---- this is the story about a far more interesting man than him.

Once there was a man who was first in love.

First in generosity.

First in a kind of greatness.

He was and still is a significant and memorable man.

Still today ---- like when he first lived ----- many people loved Him and many hate Him ---- few are indifferent about Him.

He did very few ---- if any ---- that we would normally associate with greatness.

He had little to no formal schooling or education.

He was born into a working class family ---- in a bit of a disgraceful fashion for the times really ----- His parents weren't even married when He was born.

He never wrote a book or held any kind of position of power or authority ---- ----- by society's standards He was pretty much a failure.

He didn't have any kind of special credentials ----- He really didn't do a single thing that we would normally associate with greatness.

He had a few friends ----- one of whom betrayed Him ---- and one who denied knowing Him.

And some people disliked Him so much so that the friend that betrayed Him got paid to do so?

He was a rabble rouser ---- a trouble maker ---- at least to many people anyway.

He was killed by the government --- at a very young age --- it was a public execution by the state as was often practiced at that time.

He did things that everyone knew were frowned upon.

He hung out with the lowest of the low --- the most despised and dirty people in society.

And because of this people looked down on Him and judged Him --- thinking He was making poor choices for associating with such low life's.

And after He died those who killed Him gambled for His clothes and not much more was thought of Him by most --- at least for a little while anyway.

Kind of a sad story really.

And yet 20 centuries later He is still the most influential person of all time.

The most memorable and controversial ----- some might even say the most interesting.

Some say so much more as well ---- nothing quite describes all of who He is and was and will be.

Everyone else in the history of the world put together haven't influenced or changed humanity as much as this one person did --- and still does.

His name is more familiar than any other.

And yet curiously enough He never suffered from ---- "Drum Major Instinct" ---- the desire to be great --- and first --- and recognized --- and important --- or rewarded and held up high.

All He wanted to do was serve.

All He ever wanted to do was serve.

All He ever did was submit obediently to God's will.

Being a follower of Christ means submitting ourselves --- being obedient to the way of the cross ----- putting others first.

Killing off the drum major instinct.

It's not at all --- about wanting to sit beside Jesus in the cushy thrones in heaven where everyone will see us and recognize us ---- if those kinds of seats and thrones even exist at all.

Hopefully we all want to stand ---- and sit and march ----- beside Jesus.

But not just in His glory ---- at least not first and foremost ----- but in His servanthood.

Standing ---- sitting ---- marching ---- walking beside Jesus striving for justice and truth ---- sharing His love ----- being servants of the gospel.

I wonder.

How many times do you think Jesus said something like ----- “I wish they would have done it my way ---- or I wish they would have done it this way?”

How many times did Jesus say something like --- “You got it all wrong ----- next time think about this?”

What we see Jesus doing is serving others --- leading them into a deeper understanding ---- a more focused and refined relationship with God.

Obedient submission --- is the way of Christ.

An obedient submission that includes serving others instead of self.

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve...”

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant --- and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”

That’s a little bit different than how much of the world functions.

Many of us should we get a less than ideal seat --- or a small dried out portion ----- have no problem telling someone how displeased we are.

Or if the ambience isn’t just so ---- temperature perfect ----- lighting to our liking ----- seat as comfortable and plush as we like --- if things aren’t our way ----- and I don’t just mean out at a restaurant --- I mean metaphorically in life in general ----- we have no problem making it known.

Serving others ----- can sometimes simply mean keeping our comments and preferences to ourselves.

It’s a high calling ---- this thing we call being a Christian.

We can’t enter in seeking reward --- like James and John did on this day anyway.

Jesus calls us to a higher standard.

It's ----- obedient submission ----- servanthood first.

Not do it the way I like it --- give me the best seat --- the seat of honour -----
----- look at me --- listen to me ---- organize things around me.

Jesus organized His life around others ----- around saving others by serving them in love.

Jesus was the greatest team player of all ----- where everyone was a part of the team and welcome at the team banquet.

James and John want a special and specific seat at the banquet ---- and Jesus says --- in verse 40 ---- "...to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant."

Jesus has no time for those who approach Him about having special spots and seats of recognition.

"I can't do that He says --- it's not for me to grant."

In other words --- forget about all that kind of stuff ---- and get on with serving.

Right from the get go today it's obvious that James and John are misguided.

The very first verse of our passage today opens with them saying to Jesus --- "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

Verse 35 ----- "Then James and John ---- the sons of Zebedee came to him. Teacher they said ----- we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

Few things are further from Christ than wanting people to simply do things the way you want them done.

That's called self centered instead of other centered.

And of course as Christians we are God centered --- and then other centered.

Christian greatness is all about willingness to serve.

The Christian version of the human drive to be first ----- is all about wanting to be first in generosity.

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant ---- and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served ----- but to serve...”

Obedient submission ---- is the way of Christ.

Good intentions don't cut it in Christ.

Pointing out faults and seeking personal preferences ----- don't cut it in Christ.

Stop thinking about being served ---- and serve Jesus says.

Thankfully a good many of us are pretty good at this.

There are lots of servant hearts and hands in this congregation.

We truly have much to be thankful for.

We just have to continue to make sure that we serve not out of any desire for reward.

But because our hearts are oriented towards the light and love of Christ ---- wanting all to know Him.

Obedient submission ---- is a beautiful thing that needs no affirmation ---- reward ---- or recognition.

It beats on in the love of Christ --- and is new every morning.

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant ---- and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served ----- but to serve...”

Amen.