

**“SENT TO SERVE.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

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**Texts for the Sermon: Mark 10:41-45; Philippians 2:5-8**

**Introduction:**

This story from the life of Jesus is another one of those upside down stories. So much of what Jesus says and does is upside down to our way of thinking.

The story begins rather embarrassingly. Jesus’ two cousins, James and John, the sons of Thunder, ask Jesus to do something for them, to let them sit on his right and on his left in glory.

Jesus decides to turn this into a teaching opportunity, one that is appropriate for us on this day when we set apart some men to serve. What do these verses show us and teach us?

**First, seeking to be served is a powerful human tendency.** It is our default setting. Even among the closest of the followers of Christ there were desires for place, position and power. Pride brings down the greatest of saints. Pride brought down the highest of the angels. Through pride and desire for more than was theirs, Adam and Eve fell.

Pride and achievement and merit are very hard weeds to uproot. They are like perennials, they keep coming back.

How many of us like to be first? First is very nice and very seductive. First is a fire that is always seeking fuel, and the littlest bit will cause it to flare up in powerful urges and destructive forces.

If it flared up so quickly among the disciples, how will it be with us? It can sneak up and bite us in a heartbeat. Being first is about self: self-interest, self-assertion, self-seeking, and self-promotion. We are born with it (“me first”) and we all have it. Killing it and dying to it is a labor of a lifetime.

I am struck by Jesus’ patience and gentleness in handling it. He knows our infirmities and that we are weak and foolish and easily tempted.

**Second, Jesus calls us to a higher and harder path.** This is just like Jesus to raise up a standard that is radically different than and radically opposed to the standard of the world. They are completely contradictory to each other.

By what standard does the world measure greatness?

The world measures greatness by who has the most money, most possessions, most prestige, highest rank, greatest success, most achievements, most land, most servants. You could see this in spades yesterday if you watched the Kentucky Derby, wealthy owners, famous trainers and jockeys, the focus on those who are great in the horse world's eyes.

Jesus reminds His disciples and us that our ideas of greatness are built on faulty foundations. The disciples took as their model and example the Gentiles and Romans, those in position of power and authority. We build on the foundations the world builds on.

Jesus takes on our world's views of what makes for greatness and success. True greatness does not consist of being a general or a president or CEO or politician or doctor or great athlete or actor or accomplished artist or business owner or pastor or council member.

Jesus measures greatness by who does the most for others, who seeks and promotes the spiritual and temporal welfare of others. Those who are greatest are those who devote themselves body and soul to the service of others; those who leave our world a better place.

When we strive to leave the world a happier, healthier, holier place we are doing a Christ-like work and we are showing ourselves to be truly Christian.

There is more glory in a soup kitchen than in the throne room of a king. There is more beauty and power in our nursery than in the White House. The angels see and marvel more at one who ministers or serves children or the elderly or the poor than do they marvel at leaders and captains of industry.

In the world greatness is measured by status; in the kingdom by function.  
In the world greatness is measured by accumulating; in the kingdom by giving away.

In the world you are great by ruling; in the kingdom by serving.

In the world you are great if you can order others around; in the kingdom by enduring and suffering. (See Michael Green, *Matthew for Today*, p. 194).

We live in a status-ridden and status-driven world and it has infected the church. Jesus says as it is in the world it shall not be in my church.

**Third, Jesus sets the example for serving.** Jesus uses Himself to back up His argument, to make His case. Jesus presents us with an upside down kingdom, *a kingdom where the King serves*. And if the King serves, how much then should all who follow the King and are a part of His kingdom.

Jesus came to serve a world full of people and to do so at all cost, at the highest cost. The greatness of Jesus was never more evident and more clearly seen than when He was lifted up on that cross in defeat.

We see just how great a servant Jesus is when we ponder just how much He did for us and how much He suffered, and without flinching. He came to serve not to be served. He is the giver, not the receiver.

Remember my Easter text:

**John 10:17-18** For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.

What Jesus did, He did freely. He freely chose to come as a servant, to be a servant and to serve us and rescue us from our sin at the cost of his own life and blood.

He calls us to do the same. To follow His example of lowliness and servanthood, and to follow His example of costly love (Phil. 2:5-8).

What Jesus did for us transforms us into people who act like Him. Like Him in serving, in loving, and in giving. Like Him in seeking to serve the lost and lonely. Like Him in suffering for the sake of others, suffering for the cause of love. Like Him in patient endurance.

One test of our servanthood attitude might be to ask if there is something we just would not do, something we would never stoop so low to do. Yet our example is someone who stooped all the way to earth and then the lowest position on earth and then died a terrible death. What would Jesus not do for us? What will we not do for someone else?

**Fourth, Jesus reveals to us the radical nature of our servant God.** Jesus reveals to us the way God is.

Our God is a tireless servant. He is a worker and He is working for you and for me. He is working for us all the time. He never takes a day off or a vacation. He doesn't clock out early some days. In fact He works around the clock, 24/7, without sleep. He was up all last night working in us and through us and for us. And He is going to pull another all-nighter tonight. This is so important that I want to support it with four Scripture texts.

**Deut. 33:26** There is none like God, O [Israel], who rides through the heavens to your help.

**2 Chronicles 16:9** For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.

**Isaiah 64:4** From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him.

**Jeremiah 32:40-41** I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them... 41 I will rejoice in doing them good.

Jesus is saying more than, "Serve the way I serve." He is not just an example to us. He insists on being our servant, on serving us all of our life. Yes, He does want us to serve the way He did, but it is so much more and we must not miss this. "I have come to serve you and when you let me do that, then you will be able by my grace and strength to serve others." The power to suffer and die for others can only come from someone who has already done that for us.

Trust Him in His help and for His help. In it He shows His majesty and glory. God gets glory by being a giver. And His glory shines through us when we give and serve.

### **An example from the Old Testament.**

**Ruth** is an incredible example of Jesus. She gives up her country, her family, her heritage, her culture, her gods. She moves to a foreign country with only the prospects of widowhood and childlessness before her.

She reminds me of that line in Luther's great hymn *A Mighty Fortress is our God*, "let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also." She was free to stay. In fact

Naomi encouraged her to at least twice. She could have sought for her own life. But she sacrifices self for the sake of another.

And God richly rewards Ruth. The path of suffering and service led to a far greater reward than she could have ever known in Moab. In fact the path she chose led to Christ. Ruth became part of the line or genealogy of Jesus. I see the glory of Jesus in the sacrifice and service of Ruth.

What humility and service and love and kindness and selflessness. What a response when life goes upside down and doesn't turn out the way we think or hope.

### **Application and Conclusion:**

To be like Christ takes great vigilance. We must constantly watch and pray against pride and self and covetousness. It is a constant battle with many fronts. We are daily bombarded. It is wearying at times. Press on, persevere. The way forward is on our knees and in the Word.

Humility makes community possible. The impulse to self breaks fellowship and unity and peace. Self leads us to broken relationships and isolation. When our needs and wants and desires and expectations rule then the rule of love and service is lost.

Every day gives us a myriad of opportunities to serve and give and share and think of others rather than ourselves, at home and work and in our neighborhoods and churches.

*Let me get practical* and personal this morning, about two needs in our own church family. As all of you have noticed we are very blessed as a church family with the next generation of covenant children. Our *nursery* continues to be bursting and we have at least two more on the way. But our willing volunteers are shrinking and some of our young moms are in the nursery seven or eight times a year or more.

So here is a proposal. This is to those who are not already on the nursery rotation list. Would about 20 to 30 of you be willing to serve in the nursery two or three times a year, once every four to six months? If just that many of you would be willing to call the church office and let Kara or Susan know you would be willing to serve it would lighten the burden. You can tell them how many times, you can tell them when.

If that many would be willing to serve our little ones in this way the many hands would make much lighter work for our moms and they could be in worship more often. If everyone took a turn it wouldn't be very often for everyone. Consider the vows we take as a church family when we baptize our children. Think about, and then call the church office.

There is another place where our rotation is getting very small, *ushering*. If fifteen to twenty of you would be willing to serve in this way it would lighten the load.

Over the years different people have said how First Church always comes through when there is a need. Usually the context is financial, and you are right, I have seen it again and again. But this time the need is hands on, it's willing servers, helpers, volunteers on Sunday mornings for the sake of the whole church family. Consider Jesus who came to serve, not to be served, consider greatness in the eyes of God. Who here would be great? Call the office.

And as we come to our annual election this morning may God set apart those of His choosing and of His equipping; those with servant hearts, those who sense their own inadequacy and will serve dependent on Jesus and with the resources Jesus provides.

May God set apart those whom He will use for His glory and our benefit, to watch over our souls and guide our church in righteousness and faithfulness.

The life that is spent for the sake of others, the life that is sacrificed in service with be truly rewarded in the life to come, thirty, sixty and a hundred fold.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus and the glory of his humility and servanthood. Let us all live up to the example of Christ, who came not to be served but to serve.

**John 13:15-17** For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. 16 Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.