

10-4-2020 SERMON CCI Mark 10: 32- 45 Improving Our Serve

A few moments ago, we sang the song, Make Me a Servant: “Make me a servant, make me a servant, make me a servant today.” We talk a lot about being servants in the church. We honor those who serve others. And I believe we mean it when we sing “Make me a servant.” Still, it’s been said, “You can tell what you really feel about being a servant by your response when you’re treated like one.” Our child tells us on Tuesday after school that he told the teacher we would bring cupcakes for tomorrow’s party. Or someone asks us to go fetch them something when they’re perfectly capable of getting it themselves. Isn’t our response often, “Who do you think I am- your servant?” How quickly being a servant loses its halo in real life.

Today’s scripture reading has two stories about being a servant. In the first story, Jesus, his disciples, and some other followers were walking on their way to Jerusalem. Sounds like a normal, maybe even pleasant, walk to the most important city of the Jewish faith. There are plenty of people to talk with on the journey which always makes walking more pleasant for me. There’s no sign of bad weather, and Jerusalem is a city with places to eat and things to see. Yet the people with Jesus aren’t excited. The disciples were astonished, and the crowd is scared. Jesus hears the chatter going on so he gives the group a rest break and pulls his disciples aside to talk with them about what is going to happen to him soon.

This was the third time in the gospel of Mark that Jesus tried to prepare his disciples for his death. He needed them to really get why he came, and the purpose of his life so they could make that purpose their own. He didn’t mince words: “they will mock me, spit on me, flog me and finally kill me.” In other words, Jesus will soon be treated like a disobedient slave would be treated by his master in that day. Masters of slaves had the legal right to lord it over them and do whatever he wanted to with them, even kill them. Such treatment will soon happen to Jesus. But no one will take Jesus’ life from him; Jesus will lovingly lay his life down for the sins of the world. For he came to serve, not to be served, and now that service will include giving his life as a ransom for many, even those who will kill him.

Right then was the time for his disciples to ask a good theological question like “Why does it have to be this way, Jesus?” Instead, like they hadn’t been listening, James and John said “Jesus, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” I imagine Jesus shaking his head trying to decide if he heard them right. “You want me to do what?” One writer wondered if they said it because Jesus had taught them that if they prayed asking for anything in Jesus’ name, he would do it. But I think that’s a stretch. It was just arrogant. What did they want? When Jesus becomes king, they wanted one of them to sit on the throne on Jesus’ right side and the other on the throne on his left side. They were trying to be humble though, because they were willing to let Jesus choose who got which throne, they wouldn’t fight over it. They were asking to be the two top guys after Jesus. Never mind Peter and the other disciples. The two top guys held a lot of power and glory. They had the authority to lord it over the little people from their seats of power. They wanted to be seen as great- behind Jesus, of course.

Their self confidence was so strong that when Jesus asked if they were really able to go through the baptism into suffering he would soon go through and drink the cup of death he would soon drink, they answered, “Yeah, we can do it. Piece of cake, Jesus! I imagine Jesus hanging his head in amazement. Their answer reminds me of a hymn churches used to sing

where the verses asked if we were able to do the hard things of being crucified with Christ, and the chorus excitedly rang out, "Lord, we are able, our spirits are thine."

And once again Jesus began to teach them about what it takes to be great in the kingdom of God. The world has always had people in power who lord it over everyone else. In Jesus' day, it was the Emperor and those he put in the power chairs. Caesar Augustus had the power to order the census that forced Joseph and Mary to walk to his hometown Bethlehem to register so late in Mary's pregnancy that she gave birth to Jesus the night they arrived. Pilate had the power to allow Jesus to be crucified. Lording it over people was part of the glory of the office. Power tends to corrupt power-hungry leaders and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Today we see that power as Russia poisons people who protest Putin's power, Erdogan in Turkey gasses his own people to maintain control. Saudi Arabia killed and dismembered Jamal Kashoggi because he didn't agree with those in power. Corrupt absolute power. It's why when America was founded, no leader was given absolute power; the founders set up power that is balanced by other equal powers. No one was given the power to lord it over. This balance is being dismantled in our day, but it was not the original intent.

Having the power to do as you will, to be first, is tempting. From the day we're born, we want to be first. The newborn cries and expects parents to drop everything and feed them. Young children find it very hard to not be first opening gifts on Christmas morning. We prefer to be first in line; we'll even cut in line if we can get away with it. The teacher asks a question in school and our hand goes up first- call on me, call on me! The desire to be recognized is not wrong, but it comes with the temptation to want to be first above others. James and John knew the pull of that temptation.

But Jesus said that it is not to be that way among us as his followers. God has a different measure of greatness for us. Greatness is not found in fame or power, in our position or our wealth, or in being better than someone else. Whoever wants to be great must be a servant. A servant was not the one who **gave** orders, a servant was the one who **took** orders, who did whatever their master said, when they said. Whether the task was pleasant like preparing the home for guests or lowly like washing the dirty feet of guests, they did it. That's how to be great in God's eyes- to serve others, to meet needs, to be humble enough to find our place of serving like Jesus did. In our families, at work, in school, in the church, in our nation. Servants care more about getting done what needs doing than getting praise for doing it. Servants understand that their life purpose is not to have others serve them; but to serve others. The way to being great is not moving up the chain, it's moving down. Serving was Christ's purpose in his life on earth and was ultimately seen as he lay down his life as a ransom for all. He calls us to let serving be our life purpose too.

So, how's our serve this morning? Husbands and wives, are we serving one another? Parents and children, are we serving one another? Employees and supervisors, are we serving one another? In the candidates we plan to vote for- do they have a servant heart or do they prefer to lord it over others? Church, how is our serve this morning? Do we expect the church and pastor to serve us, keep us happy, keep us fed? Or do we gladly take our place of serving because unlike the disciples, we **do** get it- we **get** that the church of Jesus Christ was created

to be other-centered- to welcome and serve **others** in his name, not to serve **ourselves**? Do we **get** it? How's our serve this morning?

Communion

At this table of grace around the world today, we gather to remember and celebrate Jesus Christ, the ultimate servant, who gave his life as a ransom for the sins of **all** the world. Christians of different colors and languages around the world are sharing the bread and wine today and so today we have bread of different colors and flavors.

Norwegian Julekake (You la caw ka) Yeesus Kreestus

Indian naan Hindi eesa Ma see

Mexican tortilla Haysoos Cristo

German rye bread Yahsos Cristos

Yeesus kreestus, eesa masee, haysoos cristo, yahsos cristos, Jesus Christ, we thank you for giving your life for us, for letting your body be broken and your blood to be shed for us, and for all the world. Jesus Christ, help us be your servants who spend our lives serving others in your name so that people around this world will come to accept you as Lord.