

Not to be Served, but to Serve

October 21, 2018, B-24: Mark 10:35-45

Sermon-in-a-Sentence: When we over focus on power or privilege or authority, we lose sight of love and service and sacrifice.

Jesus had a really challenging job of training and converting his disciples to follow his Way of **loving** and **servicing** all their neighbors. They all grew up in our world, and learned the ways of our world. To succeed, to live a “good” life, like most people, they thought they needed some power and authority and money.

The disciples loved Jesus, and they had already sacrificed much to be his followers. But they still didn’t fully get it. In our Gospel reading, James and John come up to Jesus and ask him to grant them the right to sit at his right hand and left, to give them power and authority. And Jesus’ responded, “You don’t know what you are asking!”

Yes, some must step up to fill leadership roles. But not because they want **power** and **authority**, but rather because they are willing to **sacrifice** to **serve** their brothers and sisters and the needy in the world.

We all face this challenge. Do I focus on me? My success? My power? Or do I follow Jesus’ example, focusing on serving those in need, those who are suffering? Jesus’ great commandment was to **love our neighbors**.

So which neighbors is it OK to leave out? Is it enough to only love the ones who live in my local neighborhood? Who share similar privileges that I have? What about the neighbors on the other side of town, who are suffering from poverty and hunger? Or the immigrant neighbors at the bus stop who left their country because of violence and abuse, and have come into our country and city, hoping to find a decent and safer life for themselves and their children?

The other 10 disciples were very upset and angry with James and John and their efforts to be the top two disciples, to be the privileged and powerful. So Jesus called all his disciples together 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. “But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become **great** among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came **not to be served but to serve**, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mk. 10:42-45) From Jesus’ perspective, a great disciple is one who focuses his life on serving his neighbors.

The reading from last week that Emily preached on has a similar focus on loving and serving. The rich man asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus first cited the 10 commandments, and the man had done all that. And Jesus loved him. But then, as part of

his love for him, Jesus challenged him, “You lack one thing, go sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me.” (Mark 10:21) The man was shocked and walked away, grieving, because he had many possessions. He was not willing to let go of his power and his money to serve his needy neighbors.

It is so hard in our world, in our own culture, not to focus on **ourselves**, on our personal success. Being rich and powerful, is not in and of itself evil or wrong. But focusing our attention on our own wealth, power, privilege is the problem. If we are middle or upper income, **and** we are focusing on truly loving and serving our neighbors, if we are actually using our wealth and power to love and serve our neighbors, we are following the **Jesus’ Way**.

As the faith community of Reconciliation, we are not perfect. But we are reaching out in many ways to try to serve and love, and get to know our neighbors. We have been so blessed to develop the deep connections we have with RMI, and with our local public elementary school, Serna. Those connections have allowed us to love and serve our neighbors in many ways. Part of our job at Rec is to find **more ways** that we can support and encourage all of our members to find ways for them to reach out to and love and serve our neighbors, from those next door, to those in Honduras, in Guatemala and throughout the world.

If you support Rec through your donations and volunteering, through your faithful stewardship of time and treasure, you are helping us **love our neighbors**.

I used to think that pledging and tithing was all about supporting my church, the finances and ministries of the church. Yes, that’s part of it. But I think there is a deeper and more important issue, pointed out in our Gospel reading today – stewardship is also about changing and transforming **ourselves**. In our Gospel reading, James and John are focused on power and authority and privilege. They want to be the top leaders, the most powerful disciples of Jesus. They were focused on themselves. But Jesus says, “whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant.” We all struggle with wanting to focus on power, authority, money. That’s the culture and world we all grew up in, and the world we still live in. We think, and our world thinks, these things (power, authority, money) are what give us **happiness** and **success**.

Jesus challenges this cultural norm of his day, and ours. According to Jesus, happiness and real success, are about serving and loving our neighbors. True happiness and satisfaction happens when **love** flows **through** us to our family, friends and especially our neighbors who are struggling.

We need all of you to pledge and give generously to Reconciliation from your time, and talent and money, so we can cover our budget, pay our clergy and staff, pay the utility bills, support our ministries. But what I hear Jesus saying is, stewardship is not just about

Reconciliation, so Rec can be successful. It's also about you and me individually. If you give generously of your time and gifts and resources, **YOU** will be blessed. If I give generously of my time and gifts and resources, I will be blessed. Love flowing through you to your neighbors, Love flowing through me to my neighbors will bless you and me.

Reconciliation's success for the past 50 years is not just that we've been blessed with many generous donors who have sustained our big budgets over the years, and supported us in designing and building this beautiful campus. We have been blessed, primarily, because we have had many members who have been willing to focus their attention on **servicing and loving our neighbors**, near and far, welcoming those who had not been welcomed by the Church.

So, as we kick off our annual fall Stewardship Drive, yes, we encourage you to make a generous pledge that will help us pay our staff salaries, to sustain our ministries, maintain our campus and meet our overall budget. But according to Jesus, on a personal level, there is something that is even more important. If you choose to love and serve your neighbors by giving generously of your time and energy and financial resources, if you let God's love flow through you, to your neighbors, you personally **will be deeply blessed**.

Amen.