

"A Servant's Heart"

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Matthew 20:20-28

In this passage Jesus receives a request from the Mother of James and John. Jesus views it as a "teachable moment." Let's take a look:

Matthew 20:20-28

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." He said to them, "You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

One day when my sons were much younger someone said to one of them, "Your father is a servant of the Lord." We had been reading books about Kings & Queens and Castles, and of course, Knights. So my son seemed a bit taken back by this idea that I was a servant. So he came to me and said, "Daddy, are you a servant?" And I had to think for a minute if I was.

Just because one is in a helping profession doesn't mean one has a servant's heart. It's like that story of the long-time nurse who was just a little burned out. Everyone who came into the doctor's office got the same greeting - before they could say a word she yelled at them - "Get in an exam room, take off your clothes and put on the gown!" She was downright scary. One

man was cowering in an exam room when he noticed he wasn't alone. There was another man kneeling down behind the exam table. Can you believe this? I'm just here cause I have an ear ache." To which the second man replied, "You think you've got problems, I'm just here to read the meter!"

So just because one is in a helping profession that doesn't mean they necessarily have a servant's heart. We may enter into a profession because we truly desire to serve others, but we can get lost along the way. "Whoever wishes to be great, must become a servant," Jesus said. Greatness is found in service. It's where you see how large someone's heart is.

The president of Princeton Seminary while I was there was Dr. James I McCord. I don't know how old Dr. McCord was. He probably seemed older than he actually was. He always walked rather slowly. Yet He was very stately and gracious person. He was respected worldwide as a scholar and ecumenical church leader. One night many of my friends and I were in a lecture in a beautiful hall, large fireplace, raised panel doors, a Colonial feel all around. There were about 60 people, gather to hear a prominent theologian, James Cone. During the lecture a foreign student got up and left the room. Upon returning to the room he couldn't open the door. It was a tricky door. It looked like it opened in from his perspective, but it actually opened out. And so the student kept trying to open it inward, each time banging the door loudly. My friends and I sat there and (I'm not proud of this) giggled. And it just keeps happening. He'd take a short break, then he'd try again. Bang! Bang! Bang! Suddenly we see Dr. James I McCord has risen to his seat and he's slowly but deliberately making his way across the to help the young man with the door. And we saw a servant's heart in action and we felt pretty small.

Last week we talked about that phrase, "Salt of the Earth." One of the chief characteristics of "Salt of the Earth" people is their service to others.

I did a funeral the other day where the deceased had spent his retirement years being the handy man on his street - for free. Nearly everyone I spoke with after the service told me what this gentleman had fixed at their house. "Yeah, Charlie fixed my garaged door opener." "Charlie fixed my gas grill." "Charlie fixed my sliding glass door." Charlie was great in their eyes because he couldn't stop doing for others. Those with a servant's heart do that. They see a need and they fix it.

My first church was a re-start. The church had dissolved in the 1970s and we got some of the original members back to hold worship services again. When we started up - the 2nd or 3rd week - a longtime member named, Valmore Hetrick said to me, "Rich, I just want you to know that I've taken it upon myself to arrive early on Sundays to make sure all the doors are unlocked, the lights are on, the heat's up and the candles are the right height. And after the service I'll make sure everything locked up, the heat's down and the lights are off." "That's great, Valmore." And for the next 10 years that's what Valmore did. When Valmore passed away we mourned a great man, and it took an entire committee to replace him.

I see a lot of servants in our church!

- I saw over 45 people take part in last week's the church Sunday.
- 12 very large bags of trash were picked up by these servants.
- Another group of servants prepared a meal for those living in a homeless shelter.
- Other servants cleaned tables and chairs at the Senior Center. Were there any Seniors there or staff members present to applaud? No. Servants don't do it for the accolades. They do it because it needs to be done.
- Other servants visited some of our homebound members to brighten their day.
- And still other servants spent time praying for everything that was happening.

Servants are doers, aren't they? Many of us think about the things that need to be done. And while we're thinking about it, the servants are out there doing it. That's why some servants thought it would be nice for our church to have an Easter egg hunt for the children of our congregation. And that idea quickly became a plan, a commitment, a reality. That's how servants operate. It's like the two servants cleaned all the globes in the narthex just prior to Easter. (I've never seen cleaner!) Another servant is working on an invasive shrub that taking over the area behind the Scout Cabin.

Servants have the gift of helps. In I Cor. 13 Paul lists what he calls "Spiritual Gifts." Gifts of Healing, Prophecy, speaking in Tongues, Teaching, Leadership, forms of assistance. Other translations say, "Gifts of Helping." Then Paul does something interesting. He asks a series of rhetorical questions. He says, "Do all have the gift of healing?" No. "Do all have the gift of teaching?" No. "Do all have the gift of

prophesy?" But he never asks, "Do all have the gift of helping?" He doesn't ask it, because we all do. We all have the capacity to offer assistance and service to others - in many and various ways.

I'll close with this brief story. A Habitat for Humanity worker in Haiti befriended a small boy named, Etu, whose family was very, very poor. The relief worker gave Etu a couple of t-shirts to wear. A few days later he saw one of the shirts on another boy. So the next time he saw Etu he said to him. "Etu, those shirts I gave you were for you." Etu looked at him and said, "But you gave me two."

"The greatest shall be the servant of all."

Amen.