

Reflection 29th May 2024 Mark 10: 32 - 45

James and John. What do **you** think of their request to Jesus?

Well, I think they really had a bit of a nerve. They asked Jesus for special seats in his kingdom, they wanted to be right at the front, to the right and left of Jesus. I wonder what possessed them to request this? Did they want to be visible, to be seen to be recognised, to bask in reflected glory from Jesus? Just **what were** they doing? There's one thing for sure, they were certainly 'full of themselves', weren't they? Or were they lacking some insight into what this was really about?

I do wonder, **had they** listened carefully to what Jesus had said to them? because, really, this request seemed to indicate that that they had not understood anything that Jesus had shared with the disciples, when he had spoken of, and foretold, his death and resurrection. James and John seem to have really misunderstood the purpose of Jesus life and ministry.

Perhaps they are so caught up in popularity and power that they cannot see reality, and therefore don't realise that what they are asking, isn't really right. Jesus doesn't ignore their strange request but responds gently, using this opportunity to teach them what is important in the Kingdom of God, what it is to be a disciple and follow him.

However, words clearly failed to convey the full importance of what Jesus was getting at when he talked about being a servant, so he resorted to symbolic actions. Asking them, were they able to drink the cup he was about to drink and be baptised with the baptism he was about to undergo, portraying what was about to happen to him through his passion. This is reiterated in Gethsemane when Jesus prays 'Take this cup from me'. This is the cup of suffering that Jesus is describing to James and John and the baptism is the baptism of death. The cup meaning that Jesus is going to experience unimaginable pain and ultimately death. The baptism meaning that Jesus will feel as if he is drowning in sorrow and pain. James and John are oblivious to what the reality of this means, as their desire **is** to sit one at the left and one at the right. Their quick response implies too, that they haven't really given these questions much prayerful thought or reflection as they quickly answer 'yes'. I wonder whether you or I would have answered as quick as they did?

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Mark then says, in verse 41, that the other disciples were angry with James and John, was it for asking first, for special seating, were their motives any different to that of James and John? Did they think they might have been pipped at the post for the seats in glory and that they would be missing out for themselves? Is it all about power? Or are they angry because they think that it is inappropriate to ask for such a thing. Jesus takes this as an opportunity to explain again to them what real ministry is all about – It's about being obedient to what God wants of each of us, to be faithful in all that we do. Informing our thinking and our actions as we discern how God might be using us in his work. Faith is connecting with the God who holds all things together.

Jesus explained that it is never about where you sit, rather it is about how you serve. He says this: *'whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'*

Of course, to follow Christ is to give ourselves to one another – to serve one another. So how do we go about serving in the loving way that Jesus encouraged?

This **is the** way of Christian discipleship – to look after one another, Christian service is one of the most vital ways that we can nurture and support one other in our community.

Greatness surrounds us in daily life as we see others active in service in all sorts of small ways. Being a servant sometimes means having to get on and do things quietly and unnoticed. We are surrounded by examples of those who, in quiet ways, behind the scenes serve without receiving praise and remain faithful to daily responsibilities without anyone else even realising. Serving others is something people in this church do well. We have people that do all kinds of things for others and are always ready to help in the village and further afield. There are those who care for elderly relative or friend day in and day out. Single parents who bring up their children in very difficult circumstances. Those who go the extra mile for those who need support. Those who carry on volunteering and giving their time, when it would be so easy to walk away and spend that time doing things for themselves.

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Every year at the Methodist Church covenant service when Christians offer themselves back to God, they pray the covenant prayer. These words may inspire us today to grow in the spirit of discipleship that Jesus modelled, so that our lives may more fully reflect the way of Christ, the way of the Kingdom of God. I would like to end with the covenant prayer.

*“Lord God, I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you or laid aside for you,
exalted for you or brought low for you.
Let me be full, let me be empty,
let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal. Amen.”*