

## Serve to be First

People want to be first in what they do. If you want to be on the first string, you need to train hard and play with 110%. If you want to be first chair in the symphony, you need to practice every day and expect nothing less than perfection from yourself. If you want to be first to buy the latest gadgets without breaking the bank, you need to save and spend wisely. We all like to be first in whatever we do and to do so we need to rise to the top. Jesus' disciples were no exception. They wanted to be first before God and receive Jesus favored status. In our verses for today, we see one of the many times the disciples argued who was the first. Everyone thought it was Peter, James, or John since they were the inner three who saw Jesus raise Jairus' daughter and his Transfiguration. But how wrong they were! To be first before God doesn't come by pushing others down. It comes by the kind of service Jesus teaches us today.

In Mark chapter nine we find Jesus on his final journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. But this time there aren't any crowds. Jesus and his twelve disciples are alone so they can learn some important lessons. Jesus teaches them **"The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise."** This was the second time Jesus told his disciples about this death and resurrection, but it was the first time they heard about his betrayal. I can only imagine the chill in the air there must have been when the disciples learned about Jesus' betrayal. This may have been why the disciples were afraid to ask Jesus for an explanation.

As they all made their way to Capernaum, the disciples were arguing amongst themselves who was the first before God. When they finally got to Capernaum, Jesus asked them **"What were you arguing about on the road?"** The disciples played dumb. They knew they had sinned with their arguing so they kept silent. But Jesus knew what they were arguing about. So he taught them how a person gets to be first before God. **Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."**

To be first before God, one must be a willing servant. Not like a slave who has to serve their master so they have food and shelter. It's not like community service where you have to serve others against your will. It is service that you choose to do out of thanks to God. This is what Jesus means by **in my name**. To welcome someone in Jesus' name is to do so out of thanks and love for God. This is the motivation we ought to have when we serve others.

But how hard is it for you to serve others in Jesus' name? To selflessly give of yourself to others out of thanks and love for God? I know that I don't find it easy. As your pastor I have many wonderful opportunities to serve others. I enjoy all these because every act of service is an opportunity to show to other people the love that Christ has shown to you and me. But sometimes I find it hard to serve other people in Jesus' name. I find that selfishness inside me which is willing to serve other people only if they give something back to the church or personally thank me. How about you? How do you find this unwilling spirit to serve others in

Jesus' name? Maybe it's when your parents or teachers seem to treat you unfairly. You do what they ask you, but only because you have to. Do you find that selfishness popping up inside you when you're at work? You serve your boss' demands because you need the paycheck, not because it's an opportunity to love them as Christ loves us. You hang out with boring people and invite them to your parties because of your selfish want to look popular or to be invited to their parties. It is hard to be that willing servant Jesus tells us to be and serve everyone out of love and thanks to God.

But it is that impossibly hard work the perfect Servant Jesus Christ did for us. Throughout Jesus' life he shows us how willing he is to be the very last, the servant of all. He temporarily gave up the full use of his divinity to come to Earth. He lived under his parent's roof and obeyed them perfectly. He changed the water to wine to serve the wedding party and his Father in heaven. Jesus served countless people in Israel and attended to their needs even though all he wanted some time alone. He served the common people by rebuking the religious teachers for their selfish ambition. He served the twelve disciples by taking this private time to teach them some important lessons. And as we follow Jesus on his path to Jerusalem, Jesus never complains about the service he would give to us on the cross. Everything our Savior did, he did as our willing servant and as the very last. And he continues to serve us with the proof of the empty tomb. The perfect Servant broke out of that tomb because he has power over death and gives us his forgiveness so that we will rise from the dead too.

But to be the perfect Servant not only means that Jesus is willing to serve. It also means he serves all people without any exceptions. To illustrate this point Jesus did something extraordinary. **Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."** Who did Jesus take into his arms and tenderly hug? A little child would have been 7 years old at the most. What tender love our Savior has for the children! It is to these little children, who take so much from parents and so seldom give back, that we are to serve. Jesus' point with this is not only that we direct our efforts on the children, but to all people without any exceptions. We are to serve all people in Jesus' name regardless of their ability or willingness to give anything back to us.

And this is how we can serve them. We share with them what God has given us. It can be our knowledge, skill with our hands, or the gift of wealth. We also can serve them by telling them who their Savior is and why they so desperately need him.

Again I will point you to the perfect Servant who does this so wonderfully. Our Savior Jesus served all kinds of people without any selfish thoughts or second doubts. He went to the poor and hungry and served them with bread to strengthen their lives and their faith. He went to the sick and crippled and served them by cleansing their sicknesses and their sins. He went to the confused and pointed to himself so they could have faith in the way, the truth, and the life. He went to rich and intelligent and taught them their eternal treasure is in heaven. And he took time to teach his disciples these important lessons even though one of them would betray him. It did

not matter who the person was or where they came from. Our Savior served all people so they might have faith in him – the perfect Servant. And he continues to serve us whenever we come to his word and receive his forgiveness for all our sins of selfishness.

I know how hard it can be to serve all people without exception in Jesus' name. When people are ungrateful for our service or only to continue in their downward spiral, we find that selfish ambition coming back up. Because not only do we serve people for selfish reasons, we only serve those who can help us in return. But I want to encourage you to take our Savior's words to heart. Pray for God to help you live them in your life. Be the very last and the servant of all. Serve your parents and teachers by doing what they ask you out of love and thanks for the service Jesus gave to you. Serve your bosses and clients in Jesus' name and show them the love of Christ shows you. Serve the children and others who cannot give back so that you may point them to their Savior.

Because when we serve and welcome others in Jesus' name, we also serve and welcome our Father in heaven. Jesus taught his disciples **"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."** I don't know about you, but when I understood what Jesus meant here my mind just about exploded! When I serve the people who come into my office or in my Bible studies out of love and thanks for God, I am serving Jesus and God the Father. When you give of yourself to all others in your regular routines, your service goes far beyond what happens in your little part of Tucson. Your service transcends to the heavenly heights as you serve your God who has so wondrously served you. So I ask you to reexamine where and why you can serve the people in your life. Don't serve them in a selfish attempt to be first in God's eyes. Instead serve them out of love for the perfect Servant.

Let your service be so selfless so that on the Last Day you will fulfill these verses from Matthew chapter 25. **"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'"** **"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"** **"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'"** When we are the servant of all and willingly make ourselves the very last without any hint of selfishness, it is then we are first before God. It is then we are first because of the service that our Perfect Servant Jesus Christ did for us. Blessed Lord, may you help us serve others with a pure heart as we show our thanks to you for your service to us. Amen.