

Do you think of yourself as a teacher? I believe we all teach – by our words, our deeds, our relationships. If you just want to impart information, that's easy. But if you want to change the lives of students, children, friends – through that information, it is very difficult. Most people in the teaching profession are not satisfied with just imparting information. They want their students to think differently, to live differently. Coming to worship on Sunday is easy enough if all we expect is to hear some new information about Jesus and go home and have Sunday lunch. If the goal of worship is about our following Jesus, then I suspect many times our worship is a failure.

Jesus is trying to teach the disciples about living in the Kingdom of God.

In our Mark text for today, the disciples have missed the point again.

James and John come to Jesus and ask, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."

Like any prudent parent who has heard those words, Jesus will not answer the question until James and John tell Jesus what they want. "Well, we want you to grant us to sit, one at your right and one at your left in your glory." In this incident recorded in Matthew, he has the mother of James and John to ask Jesus to let her sons share the glory on his right on left. The misunderstanding is put on the mother. But in Matthew and here in Mark, Jesus replies to James and John, not to their mother.

"You do not know what you are asking." They have apparently forgotten the incident at Caesarea-Philippi, where Jesus begins to teach them that he will suffer and die. Peter asks Jesus to quit that kind of talk and Jesus rebukes Peter. And just one chapter earlier in Mark, Jesus tries to teach the disciples about being number one. He takes a child and instructs them that to welcome a child is to welcome him. The child is a symbol of the helpless and hopeless of society – those pushed to the fringe of society.

The disciples just don't get this teaching about this Kingdom of God.

James and John are still thinking position and power. It is ironic that later it is not James and John on the left and right of Jesus, but two thieves. And his throne is a cross and his crown is made of thorns. "You do not know what you are asking." Jesus is committed to his cause and he is aware that he is going to Jerusalem to die.

The other disciples are mad at James and John for their action. Jesus calls his disciples together and once again tries to teach them the nature of this Kingdom of God. "You know how the people of our culture loves titles and positions of power." President. Prime Minister. Governor. Mayor. CEO, Judge, Lawyer, Doctor, Bishop, The Right Reverend. "But it is not so among you. Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all."

To be fair to the disciples, their idea of Messiah and Kingdom was this one who would come and restore Israel to the position in enjoyed under King David. So it is difficult for them to understand this suffering servant idea. They just don't get it. Or, maybe they do. Maybe their problem is ours. It is not that they don't understand, but that they don't really like what Jesus is teaching them.

Mark Twain said, "It is not what I don't understand in the Bible that bothers me. It's what I understand all too well."

I know there is in some Christians today this idea called the Prosperity Gospel. If you want to be rich, successful, happy, content – how do you get there? Jesus. This gospel has transformed Jesus into a technique for getting what you want.

It is difficult to misunderstand our text today. Jesus is trying to transform his disciples into what he wants.

PILGRIM

CHURCH

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SERVANT –

1. a person employed to perform services, esp. household duties, for another.
2. a person employed by a government; public servant; civil servant.
3. a person devoted to another or to a cause, a creed.

What is expected of a servant? I think the answer would be that a servant gives good service. At one time or another, we have all received bad service – at a restaurant, from an airline, cell phone, cable TV, grocery store, an automobile repair shop. We can all tell our stories of bad service.

The bottom line is that every time we expect good service. Good service in a business begins when the management sets a tone and models it to all its employees. Jesus is setting the tone for discipleship in our text today.

James and John are concerned about a promotion. They are looking for power, position, privilege. Once again Jesus is teaching that this Kingdom of God requires suffering. It requires caring for our neighbor. If they want to be great, then they must become a servant. I think Jesus is teaching that discipleship is not a direct ticket to easy street, and neither is it tyranny. Instead, discipleship means giving good service. The goal of discipleship is not getting good seats in the kingdom, but giving good service to those in need. It is a message the church would do well to revisit today. Does our worship cause us to be more forgiving, more loving, more kind, more inclusive, more thoughtful? Does living in this Kingdom of God speak to the way we use our resources, time, energy, experience?

Does our worship make its way in our living, or is it something we do and then go home and have lunch?

In a couple of weeks, we will begin our visioning process for our future as a congregation. This idea of servant must be a part of our mission and ministry as a congregation. It must be a part of who we are as the People of God.