

Matthew 20:20-28

20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. 21 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." 22 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." 23 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." 24 When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. 25 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. 26 It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

The Scripture story takes place immediately following a very specific situation. Jesus is alone with the disciples. He specifically took them aside in order to instruct them on a situation of the utmost importance. He announces for the 3rd time that he is going to Jerusalem where he will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes. They will condemn him and then hand him over to Gentiles where he will be mocked, flogged, crucified, and raised. Now I want to take a moment and make sure we get this image in our minds. This is a repeat lesson from Jesus which indicates it is very serious and important. The 1st time he told them this news was back in chapter 16. Jesus told them that he will endure great suffering at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and he will be killed and raised. Peter denies it and says "God, forbid it, Lord!" Jesus rebukes Peter and says "you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." This is a very valuable lesson for us because it is key to our faith development. The problem is one of discernment - discerning the will of God. Peter was focused on his human emotions over the will of God. This is profound Lesson on purpose - to set your mind on the divine, not on human things. Then they go off and do all kinds of ministry together.

The 2nd time is in chapter 17. Jesus tells the disciples that he will be betrayed, killed, and raised. This time the disciples seem to have some understanding of what Jesus is talking about but they really don't get it. Then they go off and do all kinds of ministry together. The 3rd time Jesus tells them is here in chapter 20. Jesus tells them that he is going to be handed over to the chief priests and scribes and he will be condemned, mocked, flogged, crucified, and raised. But this time he makes effort to make sure they get it. So, Jesus calls them aside to avoid distractions so that they can focus on the lesson. Then something unusual happens and that brings us to today's Scripture. One of the mothers tries to position her sons to a place of status. The action of the mother is very selfish, greedy, and extremely insensitive. She does not say "God, forbid it, Lord!" and she is not greatly distressed. What she did is outrageous. I'll put this in a contemporary perspective.

The family is together in the hospital. Everybody is stressed out waiting patiently in the private consultation room. The doctor finally comes in and announces "your loved one has cancer and there is nothing we can do." At that moment when you hear the news you gasp for breath, your whole body becomes numb, all you can do is cry and try to absorb the information. In today's Scripture it's like you get the news that your loved one is going to die and someone

says, "well, can I have _____?" You fill in the blank, the car, the house, the money, whatever. Such callous attitude is not permitted.

The action of the Disciples is anger. Are they angry because she was insensitive? Or are they angry because they are jealous? Matthew does not tell us which because the lesson is not about the about the reaction of the disciples but about the lesson that Jesus teaches. This brings us to one of my most favorite questions, a faith formation question, "What did Jesus do?" When we ask "What did Jesus do?" it brings us to a point of discernment to learn the will, mind, and heart of Jesus. It brings us to set our minds on divine things instead of human things. This keeps us in focus with our purpose driven Christian life.

What Jesus did is teach. Jesus had plenty of other options but he does not rebuke her and he does not question the disciples about them not being distressed. He delivers a lesson. This lesson is a parallel to the 1st time when he taught Peter to set his mind on divine things not human things. To paraphrase this lesson "the way of the world is that the rulers in the world lord over people, they take advantage of them, oppress them, abuse them, and rule over them. But God's way is a reversal of this. God's way is not lording over others; God's way is servitude. To be great you must be a servant." Jesus uses his own life as a prime example. Jesus did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

The contemporary lesson of the Scripture is a powerful lesson for us and a necessary lesson for the church. We learn a lot from Jesus - a whole lot! Jesus taught to have a servants heart. It is the heart of the character and the character of the heart. Greatness is not about getting one up on the other person; greatness is a matter of servitude.

On more than one occasion I have heard someone say "I want a church where I can feel good when I leave the service." This is known as the feel good mentality. But that is not a purpose driven ministry. Unfortunately that is what most people want and what many get. But you are a purpose driven church. Your purpose is divinely inspired. It comes to you from discerning the will of God. Your vision is rooted in your purpose. Your vision is not looking for what people want in order to attract members and entertain them so that you can grow the institution. Your vision is rooted in discerning the will of God. Your service is divine service. You want to please God. Your service - all of it - is joyous because you are reminded of God's grace. Your response to God's grace is the joy of giving. Just like Jesus you are not to be served but to serve because like Jesus you have a servants heart.