

July 5, 2009

Text: Matthew 20:20-28
8:30am, 10am & CSW 10am

Title: Push to the Back

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Matthew 20:20-28

²⁰It was about that time that the mother of the Zebedee brothers came with her two sons and knelt before Jesus with a request.

²¹"What do you want?" Jesus asked.

She said, "Give your word that these two sons of mine will be awarded the highest places of honor in your kingdom, one at your right hand, one at your left hand."

²²Jesus responded, "You have no idea what you're asking." And he said to James and John, "Are you capable of drinking the cup that I'm about to drink?"

They said, "Sure, why not?"

²³Jesus said, "Come to think of it, you are going to drink my cup. But as to awarding places of honor, that's not my business. My Father is taking care of that."

²⁴⁻²⁸When the ten others heard about this, they lost their tempers, thoroughly disgusted with the two brothers. So Jesus got them together to settle things down. He said, "You've observed how godless rulers throw their weight around, how quickly a little power goes to their heads. It's not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for the many who are held hostage."

Main Point: Jesus is inviting you to lead from the back of the line.

Introduction

Have you ever tried to find the fastest checkout line at the store? First you go to the one that looks the shortest only to find that one person has three carts piled with merchandise to the rim! So you move over a few lines where people seem to have fewer items. Then the guy up front needs a price check, so you see a new line opening and try to get over there, but four people cut you off before you even get close. If we have others with us, we even split up into two or more groups so we can have the option of the fastest line. We want to be first!

Context

Matthew has one message for us: Jesus is the only real King. He is the King of the Jews. This is what Matthew the disciple, former tax collector, and author of this eyewitness account of Jesus proclaims. Jesus is King. He is the one who has full and final authority, not us. Jesus is the only one who deserves to be at the front of the line. King Jesus has authority over all people and even all creation itself. This is quite a claim. This is the core belief of Christians throughout the centuries. Jesus is Lord and we worship and serve him alone.

The Road to Greatness

The first disciples knew Jesus were great. In fact they were convinced that he was going to take over the nation of Israel. So convinced were they that they began to argue about which one of them would be next in command! It is in this context that one of the mothers of the disciples approached Jesus with a request.

What do mothers want for their children? Happiness? Good Health? A career where they will be effective and respected? Some mothers want greatness for their children. There have been plenty of ambitious parents who have thrust their children into the limelight of entertainment, business, or politics so they could be the best, the greatest, and the most powerful. **What should you and I desire for our children and our grandchildren?** Health? Wisdom? Success? Sure, these are good things. I think as followers of Jesus there is something even more important. I pray that my children and yours will learn to love God with all their mind, heart, and strength. I pray our children will invite the Holy Spirit to live in and through them every day. I pray our children and their parents will joyfully follow Jesus wherever he leads them. If our children truly find their life in God, they will be full and rich indeed.

The mother of the Zebedee brothers was no slouch when it came to her boys.

Fishing kept the family fed, but with Jesus, here was an opportunity of a lifetime. She asked that Jesus would promise to give her sons the two next highest positions of authority in Jesus' kingdom, like two vice presidents or prime ministers. Now we are not sure where this request originated...with the mother or one of the sons, but they are all present and working together in the act of asking.

Jesus responded, "You have no idea what you're asking." And he said to James and John, "Are you capable of drinking the cup that I'm about to drink?" They said, "Sure, why not?" Jesus had just told the disciples that the way to greatness would be a terrible one. They were on their way to Jerusalem where he would be tried, beaten, tortured, and nailed to a cross to die. Were they ready for that? Apparently they did not understand. *Jesus said, "Come to think of it, you are going to drink my cup. But as to awarding places of honor, that's not my business. My Father is taking care of that."* Jesus was right. We know from history that James would die for his faith and his brother John would be exiled.

Now the story becomes even more interesting. The text says, *"When the ten others heard about this, they lost their tempers, thoroughly disgusted with the two brothers."* James and John had beat them to the ask. We can be the most self-righteous when the person we are condemning is so like us. We do not like looking in the mirror, do we? The disciples saw in James and John the greed and lust for power that was in their own hearts. It was ugly. It would ruin them all if it was not dealt with properly. **Is there something growing in my heart and yours that, unchecked, could ruin us all? Pride, fear, lust, hunger for power and praise? Holy Spirit, come now into this place. Enter into our hearts and minds. Convict and cleanse us of any thoughts and passions that are not from you. Free us to live in your pure love, forgiveness, and hope in Jesus Christ.**

So Jesus got them together to settle things down. He said, "You've observed how godless rulers throw their weight around, how quickly a little power goes to their heads. It's not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for the many who are held hostage."

Who are the greatest...those who push their way to the front or those who serve from the rear? Our culture loves to talk about who is the greatest. From athletes to entertainers we rate who is the best. Who is the greatest home run king? Fighter? Lover? Even the greatest dictator?! Real greatness is not found there.

Real greatness in found only in Jesus. Jesus, the King, came to serve you and me. Jesus, the creator of the cosmos, came to free you and me from the pride and greed that eventually destroys us. Greatness, as defined by the greatest person who ever lived, comes as we serve others.

Most great people are not known to us. I think we all will have a big surprise in heaven. Most of the people whom God considers great will be people we have never heard of...no names. For every Mother Teresa there are a million women and men who have quietly and faithfully loved and served behind the scenes. Who is great in God's Kingdom?

- The woman who daily prays for her family and community
- The man who sees a need and meets it without drawing attention to himself
- The youth who befriends the peer no one else sees
- The child who works hard so her younger siblings can have a meal

Greatness is meant for all God's Children. As we allow God to work in and through us we will experience the greatness of God flowing through us. The devotional Bible, SOLO, is available in the foyer. Encountering God in a daily practice that will help you discover God's greatness. As we come to the Communion Table today, Jesus is inviting us to His great kingdom. Remember, we are:

- **Called** - Jesus is calling you and me to come to His Table. You and I are wonderfully created by God and have important work to do. We have a place at the Table.
- **Free** - At this table **we are invited to come and be free**. Jesus is inviting you to come just as you are. You are free to be yourselves. Jesus knows you can be no one else. The bread we partake is the bread of freedom. In Christ we confess our sins and are forgiven. We are free from bondage of sin and free to follow God.
- **Focused** - Jesus is asking you and me **to discover and cultivate our gifts** and passions with prayer and intentionality.
- **Empowered** - As we drink the cup we invite God to work in and through us to serve in focused ways.
- **Devoted** - We do not care who receives the credit and praise. We serve an audience of One. We serve the Risen and Victorious King, our Lord Jesus.

Let us pray: Gracious God, Come meet us in this place. Open our hearts. Transform them to make them like yours. Send us out today by your power and love to serve in important and practical ways. We come under the authority and in the service of Jesus our Lord. Amen.