

Message for February 11, 2018

"Am I a Serving Person?"ⁱ

Mark 10: 35-37, 41-45 – The Message -- ³⁵ James and John, Zebedee's sons, came up to him. "Teacher, we have something we want you to do for us." ³⁶ "What is it? I'll see what I can do." ³⁷ "Arrange it," they said, "so that we will be awarded the highest places of honor in your glory—one of us at your right, the other at your left." ⁴¹⁻⁴⁵ When the other ten heard of this conversation, they lost their tempers with James and John. Jesus got them together to settle things down. "You've observed how godless rulers throw their weight around," he said, "and when people get a little power how quickly it 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 to be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for many who are held hostage."

Prayer:

1. Today we will finish up three messages aimed at – how do you measure your life. Next week is the beginning of Lent– as we prepare for the passion of Jesus. We will walk with Jesus towards Jerusalem. For Lent we will be working with Adam Hamilton's book on 24 Hours that Changed the World. And during Lent we will have two guest speakers – Pastor Sue Shorb-Sterling and then on March 11th Bishop LaTrelle Easterling.
2. Before we start – I would like you to do what we have done the last two weeks – take a pen or pencil and write the word SERVE on the bulletin. This will help us remember what the theme of today is.
3. In the first week of this series we noted that our lives are often measured by our performance in the workplace – even if we are retired – we still remember our time in the workplace – our job and how we were measured. Like you, I always did not like the method of measurement of my performance – and it still is hard to measure who a person is by just their job performance.
4. Jesus says that the real measure of our lives is how **much we practiced sacrificial love**, and this, far from being incompatible with success at work, might actually lead to it an entire different understanding of our lives.
5. In the second week in this series we recognized that society often measures a person by their income, their net worth and their possessions. Jesus teaches that the real measure of a person is not what they had, but what they did with what they had, and what they gave away.

6. In this final message I'd like to consider the another way we might measure our lives is by what has traditionally been called "power."
7. Webster defines power as "the ability or right to control people or things." **We desire control. We don't want people to tell us what to do. We don't want people to tell us "no"....**
8. Power is all about control of people – tell the story about how the term "You are fired" came to be –
 - a. Famously, National Cash Register's star sales executive Thomas Watson Sr. (1874–1956) was fired by the president of NCR. In 1914, Watson argued that NCR's dominant product, mechanical cash registers, would soon go obsolete. He proposed that NCR develop electric cash registers. Patterson, the president, resisted the idea. He warned Watson not to overstep his boundaries and demanded that Watson focus on sales only and not intrude into product innovation. Following an argument at a meeting, Patterson dismissed Watson. In a fit of rage, Patterson had workers carry Watson's desk outside and had it set on fire. Watson Sr. was thus "fired."
 - b. Watson Sr. still believed in the potential for electric cash registers. He joined a smaller competitor, Computing-Tabulating-Recording Company (CTR,) which soon grew into International Business Machines (IBM.) Watson Sr. led IBM for forty years and turned it into the world's leading technology company.
9. When I was in management at Westinghouse, the most difficult thing I had to do was to participate in the meetings that determined who was going to get laid off because of decreasing business. I quickly realized that what I was doing was also totally disrupting a family and not just an individual person. I always was anxious about this process – and even today replay the many scenarios and struggles that I went through.
10. Power is about control of people.
11. Jesus always talks about serving others—not about power.
- 12. This is a measure of our life – service.**
13. In our scripture today, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, several weeks before the Last Supper. While the disciples are walking, James and John take him aside and say:

"Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

14. Wow! Can you imagine the presumptuousness of this request. – *Hey boss promote me to a position of power.*

15. Think about this.

- a. These men had followed Jesus for three years.
- b. They had watched how he lifted up the lowly.
- c. They saw how he broke bread with sinners.
- d. They heard him once before talk of greatness, and take a child and say, *“The truly great approach the Kingdom of God like a child.”*
- e. Yet here they were, a couple of weeks before Jesus would die on a cross, cornering Jesus, jostling for the top positions of power.
- f. A King or president sits with his top generals or those second in command on his right and left --- and that’s what James and John wanted.
- g. When the disciples speak of Jesus coming in his glory they are not imagining some second coming from heaven.
- h. They are imagining him being hailed as the political rightful ruler of Israel.

16. Why did they want to be on his right and his left?

- a. Because they wanted **authority and power**, even over the other disciples.
- b. They were **ambitious**.
- c. I’d remind you that James and John’s father owned a fishing business in which he had hired hands. Peter and Andrew were just ordinary fishermen, perhaps working for the father of James and John.
- d. James and John were used to having people to boss around. Clearly, they were more qualified than the others to be on Jesus’ left and his right.

17. This is really an embarrassing story for James and John. The Gospel of Mark is thought to be the earliest of the gospels, and Mark just lays it out there – short and to the point. Matthew, written perhaps ten to fifteen years later, changes the story a little, perhaps to spare James and John’s honor—he says it was their mother who asked Jesus for this favor. **James and John were passing the buck to their mother.**

- a. Regardless of who did the asking, **it was ambition** that motivated it, and when the other disciples found out, they were angry.
- b. Why were they angry? Because they themselves wanted to sit on the right and left of Jesus!

18. But Jesus calls all the disciples together and says, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers' lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them."

- a. Here Jesus acknowledges that **even 2,000 years ago the culture and society defined greatness by the capacity to rule over others and to force them to do your will.**
- b. But Jesus goes on to say, "But it is not so among you." Jesus rejects this way of measuring greatness—the ability to force your will upon others.
- c. Then Jesus describes how we should measure our lives, and what true greatness looks like: *"Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

19. More than 1,900 years before Robert Greenleaf wrote his famous essay on business leadership, "The Servant as Leader," re-introducing the idea of servant leadership to the business world, Jesus had taught these ideas. *The great leaders see themselves as servants; servants to the stake-holders including the employees, the customers, the shareholders and the community...* This is where we got the term "servant leader" that we have used many times.

20. Talk about the towel and Jesus and the towel of washing the feet of his disciples. **Show towel**

21. We've asked each week how God will measure our lives on the last day. Jesus speaks of this in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats.

- a. It is found in Matthew 25:31 and following, just after the parable of the talents.
- b. Most of you have heard this famous parable before. Jesus notes that at the last judgment he will gather the nations before him and separate them as a shepherd separates sheep from goats, **the sheep on his right** and the **goats on his left**. And he'll say to the sheep, *"Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."*
- c. Then he shall say to them, *"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you*

welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

- d. And the righteous were surprised and asked, *"When, Lord, did we see you hungry or thirsty or naked or sick or in prison or as a stranger?"* And the Son of Man will answer them, ***"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."***
- e. I love this—they were surprised that they had done these things for Christ. This was just their way of life. They did not expect a special reward for it. The wicked were sent away because they had not helped those who were in need.

22. This is what greatness looks like.

- a. **Not how many people were you able to inflict your will upon; nor how many people feared you.**
- b. **But how many people did you positively touch and influence by your life?**

23. Jesus says that measure of your life is how you love. It is how you give. And it is how you serve.

24. What can you do? You can be purposeful in your helping others. It takes effort and courage to step up and to be of service. It is easy to write a check – it is hard to make a phone call to a person. It is easy to make a desert or a casserole (important) – it is hard to help serve the gift of your talent to people who are in need. You can go to NESAP in Hampstead and help – one day a month. You can join us as we share a worship time with Longview Nursing Home in Manchester in February and March. You can help us prepare a meal for less fortunate people at St. John's UMC on Good Friday.

25. Real personal growth in service occurs when we actually engage with another person – where there is a personal involvement – sharing your lives with others.

26. Let me ask you once more: How will you measure your life?

27. This week, prayerfully consider how you will serve others during the holidays. Need is often more clearly felt during this otherwise joyous time of giving. Make a firm commitment to serve.

28. Thanks be to God!

ⁱ Adapted from the Church of the Resurrection