

**Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost
Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish,
St. Francisville, LA
21 October 2018**

Mark 10:35-45

During the American Revolution a man in civilian clothes rode past a group of soldiers repairing a small defensive barrier. Their leader was shouting instructions, but making no attempt to help them. The rider asked the leader why he was not helping his men, to which he retorted with great dignity, "Sir, I am a corporal!" The stranger apologized, dismounted, and proceeded to help the exhausted soldiers. The job done, he turned to the corporal and said, "Corporal, next time you have a job like this and not enough men to do it, go to your commander-in-chief, and I will come and help you again." With that George Washington got back on his horse and rode off.

Today Jesus tells his disciples, "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 as ransom for many". As I read these words I remember the words of the prophet Isaiah in chapter 53 of his book. The song of the "Suffering Servant" describes in fine detail what "not to be served but to serve" means. Isaiah says that the Suffering Servant "has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases... was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities... was oppressed, and he was afflicted... he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people."

Today Jesus anticipates the fulfillment of this passage from Isaiah. The understanding of greatness he wants to teach his disciples is radically different to what we know as greatness. John and James want the places of honor in God's kingdom, but Jesus tells them that a truly great man is not one who lords over his subjects, in the way the Communist party ruled over many of their subjects. A truly great man is the one who is willing to die for those he came to serve. Anyone who wants to exercise Christian leadership, indeed anyone who wants to be a leader in any field, must be ready to serve others, even to the point of death. Jesus says, "I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly". "I have come to be 'struck down by God, and to be afflicted.' I have come to be 'wounded for your transgressions, and crushed for your iniquities'". "I have come that you may experience freedom from everything that binds you,

from everything that limits you, from all the chains that oppress you. I have come that you may be forgiven”.

Jesus tells his disciples today that he came to earth to give his life as a ransom for many. In fact he exclaims today, “I have come to fulfill the prophet Isaiah. I have come because, ‘All (of you) like sheep have gone astray; and you have all turned to your own way’”. “I have come to willingly accept the iniquity of all. I have come to be oppressed, and to be afflicted, like a lamb that is led to the slaughter. I have come to be the ransom that sets you free, to pay the penalty for your sins, to accept the sentence of death that you may go free and not have to lose your life. I have come to make you righteous, to be numbered with the transgressors, even as I make intercession for the transgressors”. This is Jesus definition of leadership

As evidence to the overwhelming love they encountered in Jesus of Nazareth, all the characters of Mark’s Gospel cry to us today in similar fashion. The man with the unclean spirit exclaims, “I was enslaved by the power of evil, but Jesus came and said with power, ‘Be silent, and come out of him’ (Mk 1:25) and I was healed”. Peter’s mother in law exclaims, “I was ill with a high fever and he touched me and healed me” (1:29-31). A man who suffered from leprosy cries out, “I said to Jesus, ‘If you choose, you can make me clean’ and he freed me from the slaving and shameful power of leprosy” (1:40-45). And the paralytic man shouts out, “I was lowered on a stretcher from the rooftop of a building, and Jesus looked at me, forgave my sins, and said to me, ‘take your mat and go home’. At once I was cured from the crushing power of paralysis” (Mk 2:1-12). And the man with a withered hand exclaims with great joy, “He healed my hand on the Sabbath, even though he knew this was a challenge to the religious authorities of the day” (Mk 3:1-6). And the large crowd who were healed in Mark 3:7 cries in unison, “He restored us to health, he loved us, he was not ashamed of us”. My friends, these are just a few of the stories of Mark that show us that Jesus greatness is best understood when we look at his servanthood. He truly came to serve and not to be served.

Jesus Nazareth remains servant even today. He willingly accepted a baptism of death even for all of us. Today, we acknowledge that Jesus narrative would not be complete without our own story. It is because Jesus the servant died for us that we can say, “I was once an unrepentant sinner, cheater and abuser and Christ touched my life and gave me the strength to change”. “I was once an alcoholic more concerned with the bottle than with loving my family, but Christ healed me and gave me the ability to ask my family for forgiveness. Without him I would have never made it”. “I got to the top of my field in the

business world by stepping on many people. My motto always was 'I come first, second and third'. I didn't care who I hurt or who I destroyed. If you were in my way I would crush you without remorse. But one day at the age of 40 I had a heart attack, and I found myself weak, dependent, afraid, and angry. Jesus allowed me to see my own misery. I came face to face with my own depravity. I can tell you with absolute conviction that today I am a radically different man, and for the first time in my life I am truly happy".

My friends these are all true testimonies of people who have come to know Jesus as adults. Even today Jesus remains the great healer. Even today he remains the one who willingly takes our afflictions and infirmities. Even today he remains willing to forgive our sins. After all, he was wounded for our transgressions, and through his passion on the cross he remains willing to make us whole. I invite you today to reach out to this Jesus, God's Servant, our Lord and Savior. There is no physical, emotional or spiritual condition that is too much for him to conquer. There is no amount of anger, pain or anguish that would cause him to turn away from us. There is no great big secret that he doesn't already know, and that he is not willing to forgive. He knows you and loves you nonetheless. He is the hope of the homeless, the unemployed, the isolated, the forgotten, and the addicted. He is the hope of the hungry, the thirsty, and the destitute. He is the hope of those in desperate need of justice, of those languishing in prisons, and of those dying alone around the world.

Jesus has also become the hope of many successful men and women who have come to realize that without Jesus life has no meaning. I believe Jesus can become your hope as well today. Jesus is the answer for this polarized, fractured, uncivil world in which we live. With him in our hearts civility and respect for the other are possible. Regardless of where you are in life, I invite you today to place your life in Jesus' hands. I invite you to let his saving power fill your soul with forgiveness and joy. He wants your friendship and your love. I pray that you will make him a part of your life today. Amen!