

**“Developing a Servant’s Heart without Digesting the Pills of  
Prestige, Privilege, Power, and Self- Aggrandizement.”**

Sermon notes by the Rev. Arnold Bush, October 21, 2012, Proper 24B, Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, Tallassee, AL 35242

Text: Mark 10: 35-45

**I. How and why God created us and saved us**

A gentleman was taking long walks in the downtown streets of Montgomery. As he walked he looked down a long alley where a person with gloves was looking for food in the dumpsters behind a restaurant. As he walked near a park, he noticed a gentleman poorly dressed with a sign saying, “I need a dollar for food” at one of the traffic lights. As he walked a few more blocks passing by a hospital out in the yard where several folks seemed to be crying, he asked a bystander what happened. They said their 2-year-old toddler just died caused by a DUI driver a few blocks from here. Two teens were handcuffed and escorted into the jail. So he asked one of the officers, “What are they charged with?” He said, “Assault and battery on the cashier at a 24-hour Food Mart and armed robbery. They were identified on the security camera.” As he continued his brisk walk he came to a downtown church with a soup kitchen serving a noon meal. There were about 75 homeless and unemployed persons waiting in line to go inside. He found an Episcopal Church open and went in to pray. So he asked God: Why do so many suffer? Like the one searching the dumpster, the gentleman asking for dollars to eat, the grieving family of the 2-year-old who was killed, the teens being arrested, the homeless folks in line to eat a hot meal. Why, Lord, do you let this happen? Are you going to do something about these problems in our state? As he was praying he heard God say this: Sir, I created human beings to care for and help each other. In the person of Christ and in the four gospels, I demonstrated and taught repeatedly that followers of mine are to be servants to each other.

**II. On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus states three times: The Greatest, the Number One is one who is servant.**

Here is the setting; The 12 of them are walking toward Jerusalem. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus announced his Passion, his betrayal and suffering in Jerusalem. According to Mark 1:16, James and John—sons of Zebedee--were employed by Zebedee Seafood Company on the Northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Here they are going along. Jesus, we have a favor to ask you. If you are going to die, could you let us sit, one on your right hand and the other on the left hand in your Messianic Glory? What may be going on here?

Privileges. Every King has a court of folks around him. Can we have a special place at the table? Can we serve in a very high position in your heavenly kingdom? We want power to order others around carrying out your orders.

Pill of Privilege

Pill of Position

Pill of Power over others

This request is SELF AGGRANDIZEMENT, BOASTING FOR THEMSELVES.

Translated into our culture: Make me a Vice President or a co-owner in the company. I want the best seats at the concert and in the stadium. Not up in the nosebleed section in Jordan Hare Stadium. We want to be in one of those skyboxes with all the liquor and seafood.

We want to be Number One in your eyes. Can you do this, Jesus?

While living in Tifton, GA, I placed a yard sign in the front yard and a bumper sticker on the car for Jimmy Carter for President. The county chair for Jimmy Carter for President was a member of

St. Ann's. We took all five children on a vacation to tour Washington, DC. Bill Norman said, tell me the days you will be in Washington. I want you to go to the office of our Senator, Sam Nunn, and have a special tour of the White House where you will not have to wait in that 2-hour line. We had a special tour by an officer of the State Department. In returning home to Tifton, folks would ask, "Arnold, did you get to shake hands with the President?" No, but I met his mother Lillian at Callaway Gardens and I purchased some Billy Beer in Plains, GA. I was like James and John, asking for some special treatment in the White House tour.

### III. Jesus' answer to James and John

1<sup>st</sup> It is not mine to give this position of authority, it is only for God to answer. This is not my decision to make.

2<sup>nd</sup> You are asking for the impossible. To sit at my right and left hand is not for me to grant.

3<sup>rd</sup> Jesus is using a metaphor of immersion into water. Can you go through the same WAVE AND WATER OF SUFFERING THAT I AM GOING THROUGH?

4<sup>th</sup> Jesus did not answer them in a private conversation but used this as an opportunity to REMIND THEM AGAIN WHAT HE HAD BEEN TEACHING ABOUT THE LIFESTYLE OF HIS FOLLOWERS.

### IV. The response of the other 10 Apostles

The other 10 disciples heard this request from the two sons of Zebedee. They had been working successfully in the seafood industry and possibly accustomed to perks, privilege and executive position with their father. The different translations state: they were indignant, upset, angry, jealous, KJ "displeased." Maybe outraged. For example, 10 of you are repairing a building, working 8 hours, and two show up at 3:00 to work. The local TV and newspaper reporters come for a photo: James and John are up on ladder. Pictures are taken. Here are James and John on the front page of the paper, so a restaurant manager sends tickets for 6 at their restaurant. Hey, that is not fair. We were there all day.

### V. Jesus calls them together: Circle up, listen up

He teaches them (verse 43) "*Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant.*" He uses a contrast between two cultures:

#### *Two Cultures or Two Life Styles*

Culture of the Secular World	Follower of Christ
Rulers in Gentiles	Servants of Jesus
Seek higher Position in the company	Attitude to serve others
Prestige with the owners and officers	Motive, Persons I can help
Position to order others around	How may I help you?
A higher status in the society	Do menial tasks?
Clothes, size of house, expensive cars	

**WHOEVER WANTS TO BE GREAT AMONG YOU IN ELMORE COUNTY MUST BE YOUR SERVANT.**

Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.  
**A RANSOM: A RANSOM PAID TO FREE SLAVES**

#### **VI. Servant Leadership: Is it Biblical? It is good Christian theology?**

1. In the shortest Gospel account it is mentioned three times: MK 8:34 denying oneself to follow Christ; 9:35 "In one who wants to be first, he must be last." 10; 43 "whoever wants to become great must be the servant of all." 12:31 "Love your neighbor as yourself."
2. Jesus demonstrated in the Last Supper. He took up a towel and washed the disciples' feet. John 13: "I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet; you also should wash one another's feet."
3. Servant Leadership has been around in the contemporary literature for two decades. One who is a good leader also must have a servant's heart. It is not either/or. If you are the leader/chairperson, you may do some organizing but you will also do menial jobs. Last Saturday a week ago, I was asked to organize a project on Cross Day at St. Stephen's in Birmingham. I needed eight volunteers to pull up weeds, move a large peace post, remove a large bush, and remove landscape timbers, patch hole in parking lot. I knew I was functioning as the leader of this five-hour project, purchasing the materials, borrowing the tools, calling all who signed up, writing out the tasks to be completed, and encouraging the eight persons who dug out over-grown shrubs, mixed concrete, planted ground cover plants, etc. I functioned as a leader and as a servant to assist this agency (GBM) helping 100's of poor families in Jefferson County.
4. This week I heard a stockbroker in a large investment firm being somewhat critical of a former CEO of the firm. This boss was aloof to our needs and problems. This broker perceives the boss's primary responsibility "as being a servant who gives the team of stock brokers guidance, support, encouragement. His job is to help us be successful in our jobs and tasks." Hearing this description of a CEO in an investment firm reminded me of the role of the pastor and priest, or the role of the vestry. Our role is to assist every member of the congregation to be **SUCCESSFUL AND THE BEST CHRISTIAN THEY CAN BE IN THEIR WORK AND FAMILY.**
5. What is a being the **BEST CHRISTIAN ONE CAN BE?** One who has some of the DNA of Risen Jesus Christ in their blood stream and mental processes, that cares for others, listens to others going through a hard time, encourages others, gives time, talent and treasure to equip others. As the priest of this congregation, I experience people who care, listen, encourage and give of their skills.

#### **VII. Values we would embrace and live into as members**

We value members and new members coming into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, thus reproducing the love of Jesus in our everyday life. Each member will come to the realization that a man heard God say to him after walking the streets of Montgomery: Why, Lord, do you let this happen? Are you going to do something about these problems in our state? As he was praying he heard God say this. Sir, I created human beings to care and help each other. In the person of Christ and in the four gospels, I demonstrated and taught repeatedly that followers of mine are to be servants to each other. The washing of feet is a demonstration of servant hood.

**Prayer:** Lord, at times we have been like James and John, sons of Zebedee, wanting to be at your right hand, swallowing the pills of privileges, higher positions, more power and authority. Lord I am learning the greatest must be the servant of all. Lord, help us to pray the first line in the St. Francis prayer, "Make me an instrument of your peace."