

October 18, 2015 "Servants' Entrance" Job 38:1-7(31-41) Mark 10:35-45

Years ago a college friend of mine took me to a big concert in New York. When we arrived at the hall, there was a long line of folks waiting for the doors to open. As I was headed to the end of the line, my friend laughed at me and said, 'Florence, don't be silly! Come with me!' And she headed around the side of the building and went to a door and said to a man at the door, "Let us in. I have privileges and need to get in." And the man let us in!! Her rather arrogant attitude was not challenged; she acted like she was somebody important and looked down on others and walked right in like she owned the place! It wasn't just that evening at that concert, either. She could do that almost anywhere; she liked getting ahead in life that way.

The scriptures would have us view life differently. Jesus told his disciples that in order to become great, they had to become servant of all. And God unequivocally informed Job as to his position in life with the almost brutal questions: "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, how was it accomplished? Can you send forth lightning, or feed wild animals their prey?" Remember who is God and who is creature!!

"Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant.." (Mark 10:44)

Preacher Richard Donovan told about a unique church sign. "It might not be there now, because it was a hand-lettered sign -- but someone posted this sign above the entrance to the sanctuary at St. Bede's Episcopal Church in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The sign said simply, 'SERVANT'S ENTRANCE.' I am told that there was no other door into the sanctuary -- no other way to get in or out. If you wanted to attend worship at St. Bede's Episcopal Church, you had to enter through the SERVANT'S ENTRANCE. How beautiful! Nobody could have said it better!" (Sermonwriter)

Job was desperate to understand why he was suffering so terribly in life. What he believed about God did not fit at all with the horror he was experiencing in his life. The wisdom tradition of his day said that wealth and health meant that God was pleased with a person, and that when illness and poverty and other bad things happened, it meant that the person had done something really bad to upset God. Job had been a good man, the Bible tells us, so he was in spiritual agony as well as physical. He wanted the missing pieces, to put the picture together in such a way that he could understand. But God is not restricted to our ways and understandings; God's ways are bigger.

As one preacher put it: 'Job speaks of rights and wrongs in the *human* realm. God speaks of the ordering of creation. ..God educates Job, basically saying to him, "It's *not* all about you.'" (Woody Eddins)

James and John, Jesus' disciples, wanted to be important. They and the rest of the disciples had left their jobs and their families to follow Jesus, and they wanted some sort of reassurance that it would be worth it.

Job and Jesus' disciples were no different from us in their need to find some guarantee, something to understand, some meaningful answer to life. Like them, we are deeply impressed by titles, power, attire, money, achievement, community involvement, position, the admiration or

respect of others, and perhaps even celebrity status... Jesus was on a VERY different path as he walked toward Jerusalem. So when the two disciples sought honor and status, he set them straight: "You don't know what you are asking." And he went on to tell them all, "Whoever among you would have power (would be great) must be powerless (as a servant), and whoever would be prominent among you must presume no status at all."

Our perspectives are not as God's perspective is. We cannot see the entire picture, we cannot know all the elements of any occurrence. But we CAN (and we must) keep before us the ways that God has moved throughout human history: God's ways are not our ways; and the living Word of God - Christ Jesus - came into human life to lay his own life down for us, to be a servant... And he calls us to dare to do the same for others.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ offers us the secret to abundant life, right now. It tells us that an empty life is one in which every day a person asks, "What's in this for me?" A full life is one in which a person asks, "How can I help make someone else's life full?"

"Lord, I want to get ahead, I want to be happy, I want to have meaning in my life, I need reassurance, I want this, heal me, give me peace, help me. Make my kids' lives the way I think they ought to be..." And the Lord just may reply to us, "You do not know what you are asking, and you certainly do not see how you are asking."

We may find it hard to understand how James and John could be so dense. There they were, trying to grab position and power just as Jesus was heading to Jerusalem to lay his power down for our sakes. Preacher Hal Luccock suggests that their request was wrong because "they were asking Jesus to fit into their plans" rather than trying to see how they might fit into Jesus' plans (Luccock, 812).

Jesus' plan involves a whole new way of gaining power in life: by giving one's own power up for the sake of others. The "cup" he would take would be his death as his blood was poured out for us all...and this same way of giving up life was what the disciples could not see...

Here is a story of some who gained by giving up: This story, entitled "Where is God's Perfection?," is attributed to Rabbi Paysach Krohn, author of the ArtScroll Maggid series of short stories, who said that this was told to him by the boy's father.

In Brooklyn, New York, Chush (aka The Jewish Center for Special Education) is a school that caters to learning disabled children. Some children remain in Chush for their entire school career, while others can be mainstreamed into conventional schools.

At a Chush fund-raising dinner, the father of a Chush child delivered a speech that would never be forgotten by all who attended.

After extolling the school and its dedicated staff, he cried out, "Where is the perfection in my son Shaya? Everything God does is done with perfection. But my child cannot understand things as other children do. My child cannot remember facts and figures as other children do. Where is

God's perfection?"

The audience was shocked by the question, pained by the father's anguish, stilled by the piercing query.

"I believe," the father answered, "that when God brings a child like this into the world, the perfection that he seeks is in the way people react to this child."

He then told the following story about his son Shaya: One afternoon Shaya and his father walked past a park where some boys Shaya knew were playing baseball. Shaya asked, "Do you think they will let me play?"

Shaya's father knew that his son was not at all athletic and that most boys would not want him on their team. But Shaya's father understood that if his son was chosen to play it would give him a comfortable sense of belonging.

Shaya's father approached one of the boys in the field and asked if Shaya could play. The boy looked around for guidance from his teammates. Getting none, he took matters into his own hands and said "We are losing by six runs and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team and we'll try to put him up to bat in the ninth inning." Shaya's father was ecstatic as Shaya smiled broadly. Shaya was told to put on a glove and go out to play short center field.

In the bottom of the eighth inning, Shaya's team scored a few runs but was still behind by three. In the bottom of the ninth inning, Shaya's team scored again and now with two outs and the bases loaded with the potential winning run on base, Shaya was scheduled to be up. Would the team actually let Shaya bat at this juncture and give away their chance to win the game? Surprisingly, Shaya was given the bat.

Everyone knew that it was all but impossible because Shaya didn't even know how to hold the bat properly, let alone hit with it. However as Shaya stepped up to the plate, the pitcher moved a few steps to lob the ball in softly so Shaya should at least be able to make contact.

The first pitch came in and Shaya swung clumsily and missed. One of Shaya's teammates came up to Shaya and together they held the bat and faced the pitcher waiting for the next pitch. The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly toward Shaya. As the pitch came in, Shaya and his teammate swung at the bat and together they hit a slow ground ball to the pitcher.

The pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could easily have thrown the ball to the first baseman. Shaya would have been out and that would have ended the game. Instead, the pitcher took the ball and threw it on a high arc to right field, far beyond reach of the first baseman.

Everyone started yelling, "Shaya, run to first. Run to first." Never in his life had Shaya run to first. He scampered down the baseline wide-eyed and startled. By the time he reached first base, the right fielder had the ball. He could have thrown the ball to the second baseman who would tag out Shaya, who was still running. But the right fielder understood what the pitcher's intentions were, so he threw the ball high and far over the third baseman's head. Everyone yelled, "Run to second, run to second." Shaya ran towards second base as the runners ahead of him deliriously circled the bases towards home. As Shaya reached second base, the opposing short stop ran to him, turned him in the direction of third base and shouted, "Run to third." As Shaya rounded third, the boys from both teams ran behind him screaming, "Shaya, run home!!"

Shaya ran home, stepped on home plate and all 18 boys lifted him on their shoulders and made

him the hero, as he had just hit a “grand slam” and won the game for his team.

“That day,” said the father softly with tears now rolling down his face, “those 18 boys reached their level of God’s perfection.” (Found in many sources, including the Internet)

Jesus calls us to a different ethic, telling us that God honors service rather than power. He challenges us to begin living by Kingdom Rules in the here-and-now. It is a tough sell -- and a lesson that the church must continually re-learn. Every denomination, congregation and pastor is tempted to look out for Number One instead of serving kingdom needs. We are tempted to try to preach the word that sells instead of the faithful word. Personal ambition did not start with James and John, nor did it end with them.

You probably remember the old story about the difference between heaven and hell. The vision was given that heaven and hell both contain wonderful banquet tables laden with food, where hungry people can come to eat. But there is one catch: in both heaven and hell, the people must eat with six-foot long utensils and elbows that do not bend. The difference between hell and heaven was made by one thing: in hell the people struggled to feed themselves, and never could get any food to their own mouths. In heaven, the people fed each other, and all were satisfied.

May each of us find the Servant’s entrance in our lives, in our days. As we dare to serve others, we will find ourselves touched and healed by the offering Jesus Christ made as he chose to serve and save us and this world. By this we will be filled with God’s blessing, in God’s way. May it be so! Amen.