

September 26, 2021

Text: Proverbs 22: 1-11; Mark 9:30-37

Title: "If You Really Want to be Number One..."

We all like to win, don't we? We want to be on the right side of an argument or on the best team. Famous coach Vince Lombardi said, "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing." Later he complained he was misquoted, but there are plenty of us who believe it and who live as if winning is the only thing that matters. Now a certain amount of ambition is essential if we're going to get anything done but it can be a problem if we want it so bad that we're stepping on people in order to get to the top.

Jesus and his disciples were coming to the town of Capernaum. As they entered the house where they would be staying, he asked his disciples about what they'd been arguing about as they travelled. They didn't answer because they'd argued about who was number one among them. Perhaps they were embarrassed by their lack of humility. Now we don't argue about who's the greatest. Hopefully we know that none of us are except perhaps Mohamed Ali, if you remember him. Many of us though, argue about who's the greatest but in more subtle ways (name some).a

It would seem that Jesus' disciples were looking to be famous. It seems that they understood Jesus to be a future King and that through him, they could gain power and recognition along with him.

So he said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all" (v 35b). That's what they call a paradox. If you want to be the greatest, you must

learn to serve others and do it in a humble manor. **What does it mean to be a servant? For one thing, it's not an ambition that most of us automatically aspire to.** Now for some it comes natural. But for the rest of us, we have to work at it.

We'd prefer to look after number one rather than being a servant.

There was a famous experiment done at Princeton Seminary some years ago in which twenty theological students, future ministers, were told to go to a recording studio and there they were going to talk about their understanding of the story of the Good Samaritan.

Unknown to the students, a professional actor had been hired to stage an act for them as they walked along the route from the dorm to the recording studio. As they walked by, the actor clutched his heart and collapsed on the ground. Amazingly, sixty percent of these theological students didn't stop. They kept on their way to keep their appointment.

The article reporting on this said, "Some who were planning their dissertation on the Good Samaritan literally stepped over the slumped body as they hurried along."

Non-involvement is an issue with us sometimes, isn't it? And we all have ways of rationalizing it: We don't pick up hitchhikers, they might attack us; we don't stop to help someone with a medical emergency because we might get sued; we don't want to give a needy person any money because he might spend it on alcohol or drugs.

Now to be sure, there may a grain of truth to some of these rationalizations, but that just means that we've got to work harder to figure out a positive way to serve others.

It's easy to respond to our objections by doing nothing especially if we didn't really want to anyway. But who do we admire among us? For many of us it's those people who give of their time and their abilities and their money in very selfless ways.

**Service is the key to successful living and spiritually healthy life.** If you want to be successful in business you live by this principle. We enjoy spending our money with companies that give us the best service. We like it when the place we go to is clean and they handle our order efficiently. Some people choose a grocery store not because it has the lowest prices, but because the employees are friendly and they care. Businesses succeed or fail based on their service. And if the service is bad, the word gets around fast, doesn't it? It's the kiss of death.

In our community, the people we honor are those who best serve others. We crowd into the funeral home to pay our last respects when these people die because they touched so many lives. It's also true, of course, in the church. It's our purpose, isn't it? A church that's genuinely serving and loving each other and its community is definitely on the right track. A great church gives people opportunities to serve (people of all ages and abilities) and is always looking for new ways to do it.

And it's interesting that when Jesus talked about this he took a child and set him in the midst of them. That was his example. And when he'd taken him in his arms, he said unto them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." Children were treated as second class citizens at that time. And surely, there should be no second

class citizens anywhere. There are no persons who aren't important to us. Service is the key to greatness and to having a "great" life.

I have a lot of keys on my key ring. They come in all different shapes and sizes. There are so many of them that over time, they can wear a hole in my pants pocket. Now which of these keys do you think is the most important? Well, if I want to get into my house, this would be the most important key. If I wanted to drive my car, this key would be the most important. Look at this little tiny key. Surely it couldn't be very important. Unless, of course, I want to get into the box at home with all our important papers.

All my keys are important. Each has a different purpose like all of us in this church are important and have different abilities to contribute in Christ's service. We're all different but we need each other. We're all in this together. One key you won't find on this ring is the key to greatness. Find the way God has gifted you to serve. Listen to His voice speaking to your heart or just say "yes" to an opportunity when it comes. And there you will find it. Amen.