

## **“BECOMING A SERVANT PEOPLE”**

**15 Pentecost – Proper 19 – Year B – September 21, 2003**

**Grace Church in Haddonfield – Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close**

The Gospel of Mark continues to show us Jesus teaching the disciples. It continues many of the themes of last week. Once again, we hear the “passion prediction”, the fact that Jesus will suffer, die and rise again. Once again, the disciples don’t understand. It’s like Peter recognizing who Jesus was but not understanding what his mission meant. The scene today includes the disciples following Jesus around Galilee. It’s like carting the kids in a minivan. In the back you can hear them arguing among themselves as to “who is the greatest?”

You know what that is like. We are obsessed in this country with being the greatest. We want the greatest football or baseball teams, something that seems to be eluding us in Philadelphia. We want the greatest schools, the greatest jobs, the greatest lives. The disciple’s fixation on being the greatest is no different than ours. The difference comes when Jesus talks about what greatness means for his followers (and that includes us!).

Jesus’ teaching says that to be first in the Kingdom of God, we must be last here on earth. He talks about a new way of being. It is not the way of the world. We are to be *servants* of all! Holy Scripture repeatedly tells us that God’s ways are not our ways. It also says that the world’s priorities often fly in the face of God! The call to follow Jesus is a call to **BECOME A SERVANT!** To further illustrate this point, Jesus draws on a child to represent the “nobodies” of the world. He tells us that we are to care for the weak, the vulnerable and the least.

We can learn from the least. That is one of most profound lessons I have encountered over the years. Jesus had concern for the least, the last and the lost. I found a helpful little story in the sermon help I read as part of my preparation. Clayton Schmidt tells how the passage, “Jesus took a little child and put it among them (Mark 9:36),” took on deep meaning for him. He speaks of being in seminary when he received news that an uncle had died tragically in a private plane crash. He had finished a year of schooling, and lived near his aunt’s home. The family summoned him to go and minister to his aunt.

Clayton shares that he had received some pastoral care training and experience in seminary. He felt he could comfort his aunt. His aunt had a mentally retarded ten year old son, named Joey. He shares how Joey didn’t understand his father’s death but saw his mother’s grief and felt an instinctive need to reach out and comfort her. Joey went to his room, took out a sheet of paper and crayons and began to draw a picture. It wasn’t a very good picture, but Joey had done his best. You could see what it was meant to depict.

Joey came to his mother and handed her the picture. He said, “Here Mama, I made this for you.” Then he went back to his room. The drawing contained three objects ... an airplane, a rainbow ... and a cross. Clayton says that he was at a lost as to what he could possibly add. There were no great theological or pastoral expressions that could add to what Joey had done. He learned from one we would consider the least in our society.

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**Jesus is like this with us. He turns our world upside down. What we think is important is not to Jesus. He knows what Clayton and many of us have experienced. We can learn from the least, the last and the lost. In fact, we are these people. Jesus identified so powerfully with them and wanted his followers to do the same.**

**Marcus Borg, a New Testament scholar, speaks about Jesus’ unconventional way. He says that Jesus teaches us a new way of seeing, centering and living. As his followers, we are to see, center and live a life grounded in God and patterned after Jesus Christ. Borg says we must “de-center” from our culture and conventional wisdom. Jesus points us towards the reality that life isn’t about being the greatest, the most successful, the biggest or the best. It isn’t about power, might, force, status, position or money. Jesus says that we must center our lives in God.**

**It means that we must give up trying to make God conform to our worldly ideas and standards. To be a Christian isn’t about being served ... IT’S ABOUT SERVING! To be a Christian is to be a servant. A servant belongs to another. We belong to Jesus. A servant is not independent. We are part of a faith community. Without God, we are a nobody. Without serving, we are nothing.**

**The challenge for us is to learn how to be a servant. We must stop making demands on God and start accepting what comes. It helps if we could stop looking for God in the past or future and realize God is here in the present. To be a servant means to understand our work is here and now!**

**As a Christian, this means embracing a willingness to be changed. We are to be formed in Christ’s image and likeness. It’s about being opened to God’s will, not our self-will. To be God’s servant in the world is to bring about healing and forgiveness. It is not about imposing our prejudices and opinions.**

**So here we are, and I am left with the saying of former Ed Koch to the people of New York City, “How am I doing?” Today, several of our teen age members are not present. They are walking in the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation march or bicycling from Center City to Atlantic City. Where and when have we tried to ease the pain and suffering of others? A handful of people from this parish pick up food each week. They stuff 100-125 grocery bags and distribute the food to hungry people in Camden City. When have we fed the hungry?**

**We pray for over 65 people on the parish intercession list each day. They are shut-ins, the sick, the lonely and the dying. When have we visited the sick or suffering? We pray for a half a dozen of our children serving in Iraq. When have we worked for peace in the world? We pray for a growing list of people who are unemployed. When have we encouraged and supported those who are hurting and “down”? We have countless children around us. When have we made them feel like a somebody instead of a nobody?**

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**If we call ourselves Christians, where are we serving God. Where are we making a difference in the world for God? We are called to be servants. Where are we serving God instead of our self interest? The Bible speaks to us today about becoming servants. It is our calling. Today is a good day to ask ourselves, “Where am I being a servant for Christ?”**