

Yesterday, when I was out shopping I noticed a young mother trying to contain her little boy who was riding in the shopping trolley. Again and again I heard the words, "Please can I have that, I want that Mummy!" Each time the boy's mother replied, "No, you can't have that." You could tell that she was growing impatient as her young son constantly tested her. He wanted just about everything he could see. The more things they passed the louder he became. Finally, a few seconds before a major temper tantrum, the mother said, "That's it, we're going home."

I am sure that many of you have witnessed this same scenario, or have been in the same situation. Little children want things. They don't understand that they cost money

The shelves are so full they don't see the problem with having what they see. Saying, "No" is not always an easy thing to do when it comes to our children. They live in a society that has a multitude of options. When they see their friends getting things, they want them too.

James and John are behaving a bit like children in this reading. They ask Jesus for the seats on the right and left of him when he is enthroned as king. They are looking for prestige and power. The other ten disciples are no better. They become angry at James and John because they also want the best seats. They also want prestige and power. All twelve disciples miss the point about the kingship of Jesus. Although he has told them repeatedly of his approaching execution and resurrection, they just do not understand.

James and John want to turn Jesus messianic journey to Jerusalem into a march to glory – a glory in which they will sit on either side of him when he reigns as king.

As far as they are concerned, the language they have heard about suffering, death and rising again is simply a set of pictures perhaps meaning 'its going to be tough but we're going to come out on top'. But for Jesus, and Mark in his telling of the Gospel, the cross is not a difficult episode to be got through on the way to a happy ending. It is precisely God's way of standing worldly power and authority on its head.

When at the end of this passage, Jesus quotes the Servant song ' to give his life as a ransom for many' he is making the point, with which Isaiah would have definitely agreed, that the kingdom of God turns the world's ideas of power and glory upside down and inside out.

I believe we have a real problem with the term, " servant." Historically we think of the servant as one who is totally powerless. We also think that one who is a servant has no intelligence or creative resources. And, since those who are servants are powerless and poor, how can they possibly have any faith and be included in the kingdom of God?

By reminding his disciples that "I came not to be served but to serve," Jesus provides a totally different understanding of what it means to be a person of faith.

To help bring that home, he dethrones himself. He refuses to be put on a pedestal. It is not about seeking prestige and honour, nor is it about special privileges. On the contrary, it is about serving others without being focused on rewards and benefits.

That being said, to be a servant does not mean one is powerless. In fact Jesus taught his disciples to give power away. When a person is able to give power away that is really powerful.

When Nigel and I were discerning our call to ministry our vicar wanted us to have the opportunity to preach. He took himself out of his own pulpit and invited us to preach on several occasions before we began training. One of the things that he treasured most about ministry was his preaching, but to help us both he yielded his authority to a couple, neither of whom had ever delivered a sermon.

As I look back on that time I can now appreciate the power he was giving away. By giving that power away he helped empower us as we began our journey to ministry.

Giving away power is not something we are accustomed to. We like to be in control. We are conditioned to be successful. We want others to do what we tell them. We even want God to do for us what we ask. This is exactly what the disciples were doing when they asked Jesus to give them special seats in heaven. They wanted him to arrange it so they could get what they wanted

The disciples wanted greatness but Jesus invited them to pursue a road that led to serving others instead of serving themselves. It was the "servant" who would aspire to greatness, not those who wanted positions of power and prestige.

The servant is one who empowers others. The servant is one who works behind the scenes rather than be in the limelight. A servant's greatest resource is not their ability to produce but their desire to love others.

And we as servants and Christians must show the message of God's love. We must serve our neighbours, not only because God loves them but because we want to share God's love with them.

I'm sure that in the failure of the twelve to understand, we can see a message of hope for us. For each of us is sometimes blind to what discipleship requires. Jesus did not give up on his original twelve, and he does not give up on us. He continues to set forth the upside down way of his kingdom, and invites us to walk where he has walked. . Remember, he never asks us to go where he has not been. For even "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."  
Amen