Vital Signs of A Healthy Church

Part #4

Matthew 20:20-28

Here is the context to this story. The setting is about a week before the crucifixion and Jesus and his disciples are walking toward Jerusalem. As Jesus is preparing them for his bloody death, two of his top men are angling for the best seats in the coming kingdom.

This the equivalent of you setting your kids down and preparing them for your death, only to have them start fighting over who gets what when you kick the bucket!! And do you know why we default to disunity and conflict? Because we want first place!!

Look at verse 21 “Grant that one of these two sons of mine sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.” And according to Mark 10, these guys were not waiting on mom to make her move. They were positioning themselves all on their own.

But here’s the thing, James and John underestimated the cost of following Christ and they overestimated their own importance. OUCH!!!! It would be different if they were asking for work in the coming kingdom, at least that would be a nobler request. Nope, they just wanted a place of honor.

Here’s something else we like to do: we like putting people in their place. Watch what happens when the ten other disciples here about James and Johns request. Verse 24 “When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.” Indignant is a fancy word for “ticked off.” They were ticked off at these brown nosing brothers for trying to get spots and they weren’t going to give them up without a fight!!

But here’s the problem, the attitude of the ten was no better than the two. The entire dozen had it all backwards!! Competition was unraveling the unity that had been built up over three years and was distorting the reality of what Jesus taught. When we only think of ourselves, community breaks down and is replaced with division and backbiting. That’s why the very best thing we can do as a church is learn to serve each other.

Did you know that servants strive for last place? Look at verse 25-27 I love what Jesus does next in the first part of vs. 25 “Jesus called them together…” That’s exactly what needs to happen when there is tension and strife. Jesus uses their bickering as a teachable moment.

In verse 27 Jesus said, “Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.” This was a radical choice of words for Jesus to define greatness in terms of servanthood. Jesus offered a complete rejection of the way the world does business. Instead of slamming people, we serve them.

Look at verse 28. It summarizes the essence of Christianity: “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” He is both our model and our motivation.

The picture that comes to mind is Jesus on his knees washing the dirty feet of his disciples. Jesus is teaching us still today that servanthood is the responsibility of all believers who follow him. John 13: 14-15 Jesus said, “Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set this example that you should do as I have done to you.”

Now the final phrase of verse 28 brings us to the very heart of the gospel. Jesus came for two reasons. He came to serve and he came to be our sacrifice. Christ gave “his life as a ransom for many.” The word ransom refers to the price paid to redeem a slave or a prisoner. It speaks to our lost condition and bondage to sin. Thank God we can be free because of what Jesus did for us!!!

Here’s the scenario, Jesus is looking at his place on the cross, James and John are being consumed with being in first place, and the ten want them put in their place. Because God chooses our place, and since Jesus took our place, let’s lunge for last place as we serve one another.

D.L. Moody once said, “The measure of a man is not how many servants he has, but how many men he serves.”

Let me leave you with few thoughts on servanthood:

1. View yourself like a slave. Here are some good questions to ask.

* How do you respond when no one acknowledges what you did?
* How do you react when others take your service for granted?
* How do you feel when someone else criticizes something you did for them?
* What if the service you’re being asked to do is something inconvenient or unpleasant?

1. Treat others as your master. In other words, if you see a way to serve someone in their time of need, take the opportunity to serve them.

Let’s stand as we watch this short video.