

## **To be servant of all**

May God's peace and healing be with you all!

When I first read the request James and John had for Jesus, I thought that was very rude. They came to Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you!" It is not a question! They didn't ask, "hey teacher, can you do something for us?" or "teacher, could you please help us with...?" They requested Jesus with a commanding tone that "Jesus, we want you to do whatever we ask of you." They even said "whatever" not just something.

Is this how you talk to your teacher? (At least not for me). As an authority in Chinese culture, it is very important to show respect for teachers as well as elders. I still remember that when I first came to the states, one of my friends called his dad by his name instead of calling his dad, "father" or "dad." I was shocked. I asked him why are you calling your dad's name instead of "father"? He looked at me with a very confused face, "why not?" That's one of the culture shocks that I have experienced.

In Chinese culture you will never see someone call their parents by their full name. This is not only for calling the parents, it also includes elders or authorities.

In the ancient times of Israel, respecting elders is also a very important tradition to keep. For instance in Leviticus 19:32 it says: "You should rise before the elderly and honor the aged." Therefore, teachers, the Rabbis, and the elders are highly respected. If this was the culture during Jesus's time, then how come James and John could ask this kind of question?

If I were Jesus, I would have gotten angry and gave them a good lesson about how to respect your teacher. However, Jesus instead showed much more patience and respected his disciples by saying "What do you want me to do for you?" James and John replied very directly, "Jesus, let one of us sit at your right and another one at your left!" Now we know, they were asking for the privileged places of authority in God's Kingdom.

The disciples, like most Jews of that day, had the wrong idea of the Messiah's kingdom as predicted by the Old Testament prophets. They thought Jesus would establish an earthly kingdom that would free Israel from Rome's oppression. James and John wanted privileged places in it. However, it seems that James and John have missed everything Jesus has said about his trial, suffering, death, and resurrection! Jesus's answer for them was, "To be honest, you guys REALLY don't know what you are asking for!"

They made two big misunderstandings by asking Jesus, "can we sit on your left and right?": Firstly, since the end of chapter 8, Jesus had been talking about his suffering, death, and resurrection for three times. Jesus taught his disciples again and again, what he was about to face, and what his disciples were about to face as his followers. However, his disciples still had the expectation that Jesus is the Messiah that could establish a new kingdom over the Roman Empire. Jesus knew that, he knew exactly of their misunderstandings. That is why Jesus asked them with these questions, "are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the

baptism that I am baptized with?” Secondly, they misunderstood the meaning of God’s kingdom. God’s kingdom is not about power and control, it is about service and sacrifice. Jesus said, “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.” Jesus turned the earthly kingdom upside down. The greatest one is not to be served but to serve all.

Doesn’t that sounds familiar to you? A few weeks ago, we were talking about the argument among disciples on who was the greatest. What did Jesus say to them? “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.” Disciples were asking exactly the same thing and Jesus gave them exactly the same answer, “Who wants to be the first must be the servant of all.” We can see that it is quite important for disciples to have a need to be great, to have a need to be number one. It actually surprised me that they spent so much time with him, saw his miracles, walked with Jesus, but still did not get the fact that the greatest person in the kingdom of God was the person who had the heart of a servant.

On the other hand, I am comforted and a little surprised on how Jesus was so patient and kept teaching them the same thing again and again. If I was a teacher and my students were acting like the ways that the disciples did, it would have driven me crazy. How come you still didn't get my point! God's patience and self-giving love are the good news for me from today's scriptures. We get tempted and caught up with power, but Jesus showed his patience and self-giving love. Even when the other ten disciples get angry with James and John, Jesus was still pretty patient and quite open to teach them.

I remember when I was at the Chinese church, there was a sister that many of us would call her sister Mu. She was and still is a great example for me to learn from. Every Sunday after the worship service, we will have a meal together. She would take care of almost two thirds of our meals. She would get up at 5AM to make a big meal for around 50 people and bring the food to the church. When it's about half hour before we finish the service she would run to the kitchen, warm the food and prepare to serve. Additionally there would be a few other brothers and sisters that would

help bring out the food to everyone else. She does not speak very often but I always remember her big smile and she would come to every table and ask if there was anything we needed. She always ate after everyone finished. She is an awesome example for me to learn on how to serve others.

This week, in our congregation, we lift up volunteers who offer the hospitality: ushers, greeters, people who serve coffee and many more. This hospitality is the way that we are the servants of all. In reflecting, one of our leaders John Hensrud wrote, in our serving, in our hospitality, “we want to show Christ’s face to all.” This is part of how our hospitable people express their worship to God. Thank you for showing Christ to us!

For today’s sermon, I want to end with another request for all of us (you must have figured it out that I like to end with questions and requests). Here is the little homework for all of us today: think about what are the things that I have done to serve others? What can I do in the future to better serve others: serve the neighbor, serve the congregation, serve our

families, friends, and strangers? May God bless these words.  
Amen!