

### “Servant Song”

I am sure you have all watched a Looney Tunes cartoon sometime in our lives. As a little kid I thought they were hysterical. Whatever Bugs Bunny did to outwit Elmer Fudd or Marvin the Martian was so clever. Poor Wile E. Coyote could never catch a break. His traps for Road Runner never worked out and usually ended up with Wile E. paying the price as the Road Runner zipped by making his signature noise “beep, beep.” As little kids little did we know that there was another layer of humor intended for adults. I remember watching the cartoons again in my teens with my little sister and being astounded at the adult humor layered on top of the slapstick humor for kids. Rocky and Bullwinkle was similar with its political and Cold War humor. Who can forget Boris Badenov and Natasha Fatale? Badenov being wordplay on Boris Godunov a Russian tsar, and Natasha Fatale being a play on *femme fatale*. The wordplay and inside jokes made the cartoons entertaining for adults and kids alike.

Certainly, as adults, we do not try to explain those adult elements to kids. They would not understand it. We do not tell puns to people who do not speak our language well. We do not use technical language with those outside of our field. Otherwise, we end up with blank expressions and someone responding, “Could you put that into English?” Then there are other times when we speak plainly in as stark terms as possible only to be met with our audience completely oblivious to our message. That is what we have experienced time and again with the disciples in Mark. It is why Jesus’ followers in Mark are called the “duh-sciples.” They just do not seem to get it.

Think back of the last several weeks as we have read Mark’s Gospel. The disciples objected to Jesus’ Passion predictions. They argued about who was the greatest. They failed to heal a little boy. They tried to stop an anonymous healer from performing miracles in Jesus’ name. When the people in a Samaritan village did not welcome them, they wanted Jesus to call down hell fire on them. Now two of Jesus’ inner circle, James, and John, want a special place next to Jesus in his “glory.” But they do not even know what his “glory” will be.

In the two verses before today’s reading from Mark the little band are headed up to Jerusalem when Jesus once again speaks to the disciples about what awaits him. He tells them he will be arrested, tried, crucified, buried, and will rise again on the third day. You would think that would set them aback. This is the third time he has predicted his death, but they seem unconcerned, at least James and John do. For they ask Jesus, “Do for us whatever we ask. Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”<sup>1</sup> The other ten disciples get caught up in this absurd request and become angry with James and John thinking they are going to be left out.

Unlike the cartoons Jesus had not been talking on two levels. He has made it as plain as can be what is going to happen to him. If the two disciples

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 10:37 NRSVUE

or anyone is going to share in his “glory” they are going to have to go through some terrible trials. Even now he reminds them that they will have to drink the cup that he drinks and endure the baptism with which he will be baptized. They agree without considering what he is saying. He then promises them the same cup and baptism but does not promise them to be seated next to him, for it is not his to offer.

These disciples in their naïveté or in their hubris are signing up for more than they understand. Then Jesus turns the tables on them reminding them that in Gentile society the leaders lord it over others. That is, they use their position as a place of privilege and take advantage of the average citizen. He reminds the disciples that among the Gentiles “their great ones are tyrants over them.” Then he lets the hammer drop when he says, “Not so with you.” Whatever they felt was going to accrue to them due to their following of Jesus has just been pulled away from them.

Then Jesus lays out what they are being called to do in his name. He tells them, “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.” I can see them now with their mouths hanging open in surprise. What do you think was going through their heads at that moment? [Listen for: this is not what I signed up for, I do not want to die, we are going to be tortured? why do they hate us so, what about my family, I should have stayed on the fishing boat, ....] What felt like an exhilarating ministry, may have now felt like a mistake.

Being a follower of Jesus is not like being the follower of a pop star. It is more than just attending an event and getting the T-shirt, a whole lot more. We are called to love one another, even our enemies. We are called to pray for one another. We are called to care for one another, sharing our clothes, food, shelter, and money with those who have less than us. We are called to work to make disciples of other nations. We are called to serve one another. Jesus set the example with the service of his life as he healed people of infirmities and diseases. He preached and taught people what would lead them to an abundant life. He set the example with the humbling act of washing his disciples’ feet. He accepted death on a cross.

We are disciples and we are called to a life of service as surely as the first disciples were. We do not get a pass for being too young, too old, or too busy. Our financial contributions to the church and its ministries are important and part of our stewardship of all that God has given us, but they do not buy us out of service to others. Serving God means serving God’s people. That may mean getting our hands dirty. It may mean doing something we do not really want to do such as visiting someone in jail, feeding the poor on the street, caring for the sick. We may be put off by these calls to serve but they are what Jesus tells us discipleship means.

Imagine you are called to serve the poor of an overcrowded city only to realize it means only caring for those who are dying. That happened to St. Theresa of Kolkata. St. Francis of Assisi was horrified by leprosy and found

himself face to face with a person with leprosy whom he could not ignore. Blues Musician Daryl Davis found himself called to confront and convert members of the KKK from their racist beliefs.

We do not get to select our service to God, it is a calling. When we are called, we can ignore like the rich man seems to do in last week's Gospel lesson.<sup>2</sup> We can hesitate as these disciples might be doing. We can accept and then walk it back as Peter did.<sup>3</sup> Or we can bravely accept our assignment and do our best. It is not guaranteed to be easy, but nothing worth doing is. What better thing can we do than to serve God and Jesus knowing we are doing so in his image. There is nothing more beautiful and fulfilling than doing just that.

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 10:17-31

<sup>3</sup> Mark 14:66-72