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*Servant of All*  
**Mark 10:35-45**

<sup>35</sup> James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to Jesus and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” <sup>36</sup> And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” <sup>37</sup> And they said to him, “**Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.**” <sup>38</sup> But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” <sup>39</sup> They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; <sup>40</sup> but to sit at my right hand or at my left **is not mine to grant**, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

<sup>41</sup> **When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John.** <sup>42</sup> So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. <sup>43</sup> But it is not so among you; but **whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,** <sup>44</sup> **and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.** <sup>45</sup> For the Son of Man came **not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.**”

We are not that different from James and John, you know?  
It’s easy to say we are, that we’d be like the other ten disciples, but truth be told,  
James and John were probably just saying what all 12 had been thinking!  
We are the same way, so often **addicted** to competition,  
And trying to be first,  
trying to be great.

All we have to do look at **TV or the web**,  
and we see all kinds of people who are  
trying to be famous, powerful, rich, and #1.

We make **lists about ‘great people’, right?**  
There’s the TIME’s ‘Person of the year’,  
Forbes “Celebrity 100”,  
Business Insider’s “A-List”.  
ESPN’s ‘World Fame 100’ List.

*Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube,*  
Are full of people trying to *make a name for themselves.*

And even if you don't want to be rich and famous,  
Do you ever *long for success?*  
Or *strive for perfection?*  
Isn't that a kind of greatness that many of us seek?

I know I've struggled with *perfectionism.*  
In school, I wanted to prove myself by making *straight As,*  
and being involved in lots of activities.  
This was how I tried to find *significance.*  
I still struggle with this desire to do better all the time.  
Can you relate?

But Jesus says *seeking success is NOT the goal.*  
We are NOT called to be *GREAT.*  
We are called to be *SERVANTS.*

Earlier in the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 8, Jesus says we should deny ourselves,  
*take up our cross and follow Him.*  
Which sounds a little crazy when you think about us humans---  
Because who wants to be a *follower?*  
Who wants to *deny* themselves?  
Who wants to take up a *cross* of suffering and sacrifice, instead of success?  
But that is Jesus' call for us!

In fact, each time Jesus tells his disciples he is going to suffer and die,  
He also says something about our call to serve.  
In Chapter 9, after talking about his death a second time,  
The disciples start arguing about *who is the greatest,* and Jesus says:  
*"whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all".*  
Then here, in Chapter 10, Jesus talks about his death again,  
And James and John approach him seeking a place of honor in his kingdom!  
*So he says again, "whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all".*

They thought they were following a *Messiah*  
of power, and prominence—because he was the *Son of God!*

So, it would have been natural  
to want a place of prominence for themselves?  
Because they were his disciples!

But Jesus keeps telling them that *they are missing the point*.  
All throughout the Gospel of Mark the disciples misunderstand  
who Jesus is and what he's come to do.

As *Jesus is modeling* and encouraging *service, humility, and sacrifice*,  
They keep talking about who is the *greatest*,  
*And how they can secure their own power*.

But Jesus *doesn't scold* them.  
He just keeps saying:  
“*Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.*”

*Last.*

*Servant.*

These are *strange words* when we think about it,  
because our *world* is built  
upon striving to be best, great, and powerful, *not last or a servant*.

*The world says:*

Do whatever you need to do to be the best!

So, how on earth can we *embrace Jesus' call* to be servants?  
And what is the *connection* between *SUFFERING and SERVICE*?  
*Jesus always mentions SUFFERING before* our call to servanthood.

A friend recommended a great book to me called  
*Kitchen Table Wisdom* by Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen.  
Remen is an oncologist who writes  
about the spiritual journeys of herself and her patients.  
Remen herself has some serious health struggles.

She writes about sitting next to a man on a flight,  
whose *lunch has fallen onto the floor on his shoe*.  
But he doesn't bend down to clean it up, he doesn't even seem to notice.  
That's when she notices a *brace* on his leg.

She gets a wet towel from an attendant and *slowly starts to clean up his shoe* and the floor around him, as they strike up a conversation.

She learns that he has *just suffered a stroke* affecting his left side, and the feeling in both arms from fingers to elbows, but he was determined to fly out to visit his son.

He used to play violin before his stroke, but now he is partially paralyzed, barely able to care for himself.

He thanks her, as does the flight staff, who had rudely told her they didn't have time to help this man.

She writes: *suffering is one of the universal conditions of being alive...we have become terribly vulnerable, not because we suffer, but because we have separated ourselves from each other. A patient once told me he had tried to ignore his own suffering and the suffering of other people because he wanted to be happy. Yet becoming numb to suffering will not make us happy.*

***The part in us that feels suffering is the same as the part that feels joy.***

Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom* 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Riverhead: New York, 2006. pg. 147-8.

I love that. The part that feels suffering, is the part that feels joy.

Jesus knows that.

Jesus calls us to *this better life, of service, and joy.*

***Which is also the path of suffering and sacrifice!***

Which brings us to the acronym **J.O.Y.**

Do you believe that our priorities are in that word?

***Jesus*** first, then ***Others***, then ***Yourself***?

According to Jesus, that's how we find true *significance*, real *fulfillment, and joy*.

Putting ***Jesus FIRST***—is really trying to follow in his footsteps of *servanthood*, because he is the Savior who washed his disciples' feet!

He is the one who went to death on the cross, all out of *love, service and sacrifice!*

He says so himself: *For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.*”

***Philippians 2:1-11*** puts it so well:

*make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love....*

<sup>3</sup> *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit,*

but in humility **regard others as better** than yourselves.

<sup>4</sup> Let each of you **look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.**

<sup>5</sup> Let the same mind be in you that was<sup>[a]</sup> in Christ Jesus,

<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God,

did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,

<sup>7</sup> but **emptied himself**,

taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

<sup>8</sup> he **humbled himself**

and became **obedient** to the point of death—

even death on a cross.

Jesus is the **ultimate example** of how to  
**Put God first, then others....**

That's the second letter of **JOY—Others.**

When we put others first,

it's not about never thinking of yourself,

it's about a love for others, especially the least of these.

This is an important **distinction.**

Sometimes these words have been wrongly used

To say you shouldn't **stand up for yourself**,

or care at all about yourself,

which strangely can become its own kind of power.

But what if, in looking out for the least of these, we find ourselves?

Jesus had a **special love for the least and the little.**

This is why Jesus **took a little child** and said,

*"Whoever welcomes a **child** in my name welcomes me..."*

That was revolutionary---

**Because in Jesus' day, children were non-persons**, just property,  
useful for their work.

They were **not to be seen OR heard!**

Why would Jesus so love the least and the little?

What if he's trying to get us to **reimagine greatness!**

We think of the *powerful, the rich, the influential*--  
 But Jesus talks about the tiny *sparrow*,  
 the *repentant sinner*, the sick, the leper, the demon-possessed,  
 the outcast, the women,  
 the tax collectors, the prostitutes,  
 and the children.

In fact, Jesus *came into this world as a little child*,  
 A poor baby born in a manger!

What's so hard is that we are *almost HARDWIRED to* want to be first, not last.  
 We *want people to SERVE US*, not the other way around.  
 And we want that for our kids, our families, even our churches.

But Jesus shows us that the *way of true greatness---*  
 is *service, sacrifice, and humility*.  
 It's *putting OTHERS first*.

I was reading a sermon by Dan Meyer in Preaching Today,  
 entitled *Looking Otherward*.  
 Otherward people have a few *key characteristics*.  
 The first is *OUTGOING*.  
 Which is not about being an extrovert,  
 but about being someone who *builds relationships*.

The second characteristic is being a *TREASURE-SEEKER*,  
 looking for the good, and the gifts in others!  
 Which is so important for ministry.  
 We shouldn't do everything ourselves,  
 because then we are keeping others from using their gifts.  
 If I'm doing my job right, I'm not doing everything,  
 I'm encouraging and empowering others to use their gifts,  
 in service and ministry!

The third characteristic of an Otherward person is being *HOSPITABLE*.  
 Are we welcoming others?  
 Especially the least and the little?

The fourth trait is **EMPATHY**.  
 Empathy is so lacking in our world today,  
 But Jesus models it for us.  
 He met people in their pain and had compassion for them.

Empathy is **NOT pity**—it's about being **with others** in their suffering,  
 standing alongside them, stepping into their shoes,  
*not feeling sorry* for them.

There's a story of a child who was late coming home for dinner.  
 She told her Dad that she'd met another kid who'd dropped the milk on his way  
 home from the store.  
 "So you stayed to help him clean it up?" asked the Dad.  
 "No," she said, "**I stayed to help him cry** till he got the courage to go home."  
 Empathy is **Dr. Remen cleaning that man's shoe** as they talked.

This trait might be the **most IMPORTANT one**.  
 But how do we **cultivate empathy**?  
 We really have to look to Jesus.  
 And **when** Jesus teaches about servanthood and sacrifice.

**Empathy comes through adversity**. Through **suffering**.  
 When we've walked through hard times,  
 we are able to walk with others through their hard times.  
 Empathy is key to **loving our neighbors, and putting others first**.

A fifth Otherward trait is **RESOURCEFULNESS**.  
 This means connecting people with the resources they need in life.

And finally, Otherward people are **SELF-SACRIFICING**.  
 If we are willing to follow Jesus,  
 we must sacrifice what **we want**  
**for what JESUS WANTS** in our lives.

From a sermon by Dan Meyer, *Looking Otherward*, preachingtoday.com, July 2017.

None of putting others first **comes naturally**.  
**A servant's heart is not what we're born with**.  
 It is only possible to become a true servant,  
 if we **allow the Holy Spirit to work on us**.  
 The question is, **will we allow the Spirit to expand our hearts in this way?**

***That final letter of JOY is also important.***

Jesus said that the Greatest Commandment was to love God,  
and your neighbor as ***Yourself***.

So we must love ourselves—

And that comes from ***knowing how much God loves us***.

But what if we ***learn even this from serving and loving others?***

Have you ever found yourself to be ***blessed, while giving*** to someone else?

What if, when we reach out to others,

we find not only Joy, but also how to love ***ourselves?***

What if the ***key*** to loving ourselves is found in ***loving Christ and one another?***

Friends, we have some ***Good News*** today.

We are called to be ***last, to be servants,***

But in doing this, we find ***abundant life, and joy***.

May we ***allow the Holy Spirit to work*** on our hearts,

And for that, all God's people can say together, Amen.