

“If everybody would just do things my way, everything would go much better.”

“This isn’t like my old church. They don’t do things right here.”

Every one of us has at least been tempted to say things like that. And more than a few of us have probably given in to that temptation and said—and meant—things just like that. The flesh—our sinful nature—likes to be served. It wants to be served— even needs to be served. And when our sinful nature doesn’t get what it wants— our mouths give voice to the sin that lives in our hearts. We say things that let the whole world know—we’re not here to serve—we’re here to BE SERVED.

Even the apostles suffered from such desires of their sinful nature. They too sought to be served. James and John—the sons of Zebedee—send their mother to Jesus to ask him a question. Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left in your kingdom. Sure, they were more subtle than we are sometimes, but the desire is the same. They want to be served. They want to be in positions of power with Jesus. One wants to be president—The other wants to be prime minister when Jesus finally comes into his kingdom.

James and John had it wrong though—just like we get it wrong—when we only think of ourselves and long for others to do our bidding and serve us. Jesus, on the other hand—gets it right—like he always does:

Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
(St. Matthew 20.26-28)

Whether you’re an apostle or just a regular person like all of us are—following Jesus means being a servant. Jesus even uses the word slave. Servants don’t seek positions of power. Servants don’t seek to get their way. Servants don’t seek to be served—they seek to serve: They serve their Lord, they serve their neighbour, and they serve even those whose job it is to serve them.

So how might you be a better servant? First—keep your eyes and your ears and your heart fixed on Jesus. Listen as Jesus tells us today exactly what will happen to him—the Son of God who came to serve rather than be served. He says:

See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priest and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to be the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.
(St. Matthew 20.18-19)

Jesus will be delivered over to those in authority. Jesus will be condemned to death. He will be given to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and He will be crucified. Being a faithful, Christian servant means fixing your eyes and your ears and your heart on Jesus—and suffering along with him—even while you serve. Because Jesus' service is the service that saves. By his holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death Jesus has served the sentence your sinful flesh has earned with its desire to be served all the time. By his crucifixion, Jesus has served you with your salvation and delivered you from the hands of hell. Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many—Jesus gave his life as a ransom for your body and soul.

Servanthood will not win you any prizes. Being a servant will not always win you praise—but Jesus' service has earned your eternal reward in heaven above. So we, as faithful followers of Jesus' focus on Jesus and seek to serve. But, such Christian service has consequences. Jesus told James and John that they, too, would drink the cup that he was to drink. They too would suffer at the hands of sinful men. They too would die for their servanthood. They would suffer for your service...but positions of power, they're not part of the plan.

You too may suffer for your service. Positions of power may not be part of the plan for you, either. You may never be in a position to tell the powers that be how to run our church, or any other place for that matter. You may never have the authority to tell people that they have to do things your way.

And you may never again be in a place that does things the way they used to do it at your old church. But none of those things matter in your Christian life.

What does matter is Jesus. Jesus who serves, rather than seeks to be served. Jesus who served you and all humanity by willingly dying on the cross to forgive the sinful desires of your sinful flesh. Jesus matters. Jesus, who rose from the grave on the third day after an earthly life of service to take up his heavenly service once again at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

From God the Father's right hand Jesus serves you now by praying for you without ceasing. He serves you by pouring down his unending grace and mercy through his Word and Sacraments. Jesus is serving you this very instant by being present with us right here in this place and granting us the privilege of serving under him in his kingdom even while we wait for that kingdom to be fully revealed. Jesus' service is the service that matters most of all.

Service is hard. Being a servant goes against everything we want for ourselves, and it goes against every desire of our sinful nature. But service is a discipline to which we and all Christians are all called, not just during Lent, but throughout our lives. Lent is a good time to take up service again in your own life, especially in those places where you'd rather be served than serve.

When everything would go better if everyone else just did it your way, perhaps you could take a moment and reflect on the way things are being done, and see the value in that.

And when even Church doesn't feel like it used to, perhaps you could offer up a prayer to Jesus to continue to pour down his mercy and grace on you regardless of whether the service looks and sounds and feels just like it did at your old church!

When we serve, no matter how we do it, we follow Jesus. We follow him in ministry by helping others and serving them. We follow him in suffering in this earthly life for the sake of those we serve. We follow Jesus to the cross, and drink of his cup there, suffering and perhaps even dying for our faithfulness and service.

True, devout, Christian service, borne of faith in Christ Jesus and his free salvation, follows Jesus in service here in this life, because we know we will follow him into the life of the world to come. Will you sit at his right hand or his left in his eternal kingdom? I don't know. Those places are reserved for those for whom they have been prepared by God our Father. But I do know this. Service to others out of love and faithfulness to Christ is a great blessing to others that reflects Christ's blessings to you.

So, repent of your sinful desire to be served. Mortify your flesh and quench the desires of your sinful nature. Serve as Christ has served you. Because of Christ's service upon the cross of Calvary, you will live forever in Christ's kingdom. And there we will all gladly serve the Lord our God forever and ever. Amen.