

"When you read the sermon for yourself - try to hear Pastor Paula's tone and pace of speech. This sermon is written to be spoken and may not be grammatically correct. If you would like to hear it go to the UCC Sanbornton YouTube channel any time - search for the date the sermon was given." Pastor Paula

Sermon

Oct 17, 2021

Mark 10: 35-45

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be pleasing to you God of Love. Amen

For almost three weeks my husband, Bill and I were on vacation. After several plan changes, we went to Gloucester Mass for a few days overlooking the ocean; Old Orchard Beach Maine, where we were right on the beach watching people surf, walking on the beach. We went to a little-known golf resort for a few days in Poland Spring Maine, and our final stop was Acadia National Park near Bar Harbor with friends. The weather was amazing, gentle hikes, and walks through beautiful gardens, amazing sunsets and good friends what more could we ask for? The beauty of nature surrounded us the entire trip, with the loud sounds of the crashing waves, the beauty of the changing leaves and the silence of the forest. Truly wonderful. Our final drive home was over 5 hours and I was ready to be home in my own bed.

Like so many others today we have an EZ-pass so that we can zip through the tolls without even slowing down or stopping. The transponder, the thing on our windshield, contains all the information needed so the toll can be automatically deducted from our credit card and we can keep on zooming by. The EZ pass is like a pass to the front of the line. Like those “special” people who are “premier” executive flyers or first-class flyers who get to board the airplane first; or the VIPs at Disney World who get to go to the front of the line. Everyone wants the easy way to the front of the line, a quick way to fast track success or just to get the best seat. I remember what a joy it was to be “line leader” in elementary school. It was assigned to us so when it was your turn you didn’t have to rush or push to get there first. I can still remember that special feeling of joy, and being first, being special.

James and John, the brothers of Zebedee, are no different. They too, want to have places of honor – to feel special, to be seated at either side of Jesus. They had been listening to Jesus for three years now; they hear what he is saying about the kingdom, and they want to zoom, and zip to the front of the line ahead of the rest. So, they go alone to Jesus. They tell him in whispers what they want. Jesus hears them out and then loudly replies, that he’s not in the business of handing

out favors and EZ-Passes. You two guys will just have to wait in line with everybody else.

When the other 10 disciples hear that James and John wanted their own special and private EZ-Pass into the coming kingdom, they get miffed. They are sitting there, stuck in spiritual traffic, so to say and they don't think it's right that the two brothers should ever have even asked for an EZ pass or a place of honor.

Jesus, then tells them, you have it backward. In heaven there are no special EZ passes or places. And if there were, I couldn't hand them out anyway. I'm just a servant. I'm not in charge. On earth there may be such a thing, but earth's not heaven. Heaven has different rules. Jesus goes on to teach them about what servant leadership is about – and the kind of leaders God is calling them to be.

Jesus tells them that they are **wrong** if they think **that the first will be first**, and the last will be last. He tells them the ways of God are different – that for God, the last shall be first, and the first shall be last. Christ continues to remind how godless rulers throw their weight around, and when people get a little power how quickly it goes to their heads. It's not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Jesus goes on to tell them that among you it's **got** to be different.

He tells them that servant leaders don't get an EZ-Pass. Servant leaders are people who embrace both the concept of serving others and the idea of serving someone greater and beyond themselves. A true spiritual leader serves first, and leads others by example. Servant leadership comes from a place of love of God.

Servant-leaders are people who understand the importance of awareness, listening, empathy and building community. They understand that it isn't about me; it's about you. They are people who understand what it means to be last. And if being last means that someone else is empowered to be first, that is all the reward they need.

Being a servant isn't easy, but if we are following Jesus, it's necessary. Jesus says to the disciples, look at me, I didn't come to lead, I came to serve; to serve God and to serve each of you. Servant leadership is not about position or skill, it's about attitude. Servant leaders seek ways that they can add value to others lives, and the primary way is by serving them.

Corrie ten Boom and her sister Betsy come to my mind as amazing examples of servant leaders. They had the attitude and heart for service that could only come from their faith in Jesus. Corrie and Betsy's family had helped Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust during World War II and, by all accounts, saved

nearly 800 lives. They grew up in a devoutly religious Christian family. Their family harbored hundreds of Jews to protect them from arrest by Nazi authorities. Betrayed by a fellow Dutch citizen, the entire family was imprisoned. Corrie and her sister were placed together in the same concentration camp and building. Corrie survived and later told their story in a book entitled *The Hiding Place*. The scene in the book that stands out to me is when they arrive in this cramped, smelly, woman's barracks. Bunk beds were stacked 4 high – one could not even sit on their bed without banging their head on the bunk above. Corrie, laid in her bed nauseas from the stench, when something bit her ankle. Jumping up and banging her head, she shouted to Betsy – “there are flea's everywhere – how can we live in this place?” Her dear sister Betsy replied with excitement, “that's it, Corrie – God's answer to this morning's prayer and devotion. Read the scripture again.” Corrie checked to see if the guards were around, then pulled out her bible that she had somehow smuggled in. She read 1st Thessalonians 5 verse 18. “Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus ...” Puzzled, Corrie asked – what are you talking about. Betsy replied; “give thanks that we have been placed together.... give thanks that you were able to smuggle in the bible ... give thanks that there are so many women cramped in to this place – now they will all get to hear the word of God

because you have your bible. In her book Corrie comes to an attitude of gratitude even for the fleas – because of the fleas the guards seldom, if ever, came in to the room – keeping the woman safe from the guards and providing opportunities for them to have bible studies in the camp without fear of a guard coming in. These two women, truly had attitudes and hearts of a servant leader. Not only finding things to be thankful for but for continuing to serve God and share God's love in the midst of horrible, horrible circumstances.

Jesus didn't use an EZ Pass – although he had plenty of opportunities.

Corrie and Betsy didn't use an EZ Pass either – they chose to follow Jesus' example of being a servant and showing God's love to all those who would listen. Jesus never said that following God's way in this world would be easy or quick. And when we really stop to think about it Corrie and Betsy's lives, even while in the concentration camp, they were able to experience joy, gratitude, hope, grace and love because of their faith. Even under such awful conditions, with Jesus as their servant leader, they were able to continue to serve others – making their lives and the lives of others bearable.

Jesus is telling the disciples and us that living a life of service to God and to others is the way we are called to live as Christians and there is no EZ pass.

May it be so.