

Voices: I will put others before myself in church

November 29, 2016

Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."



Eric Black He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

"Teacher," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."

"Do not stop him," Jesus said. "For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward. (Mark 9:35-41)

"Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

You mean, if we're going to sign up for this Christianity thing, Jesus expects us to come in dead last, to serve everybody else? Well, that's not a very good sales pitch for a ticket to heaven! Why would Jesus say that?



What Jesus said

If we zoom out and read what Jesus said to his followers right before, we may have our answer"

They left (where they were) and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest (Mark 9:30-34).

Jesus needed some private time with his followers to tell them one of the most important things he was ever going to tell them, "They're going to kill me." Then, all his followers could do was argue about which of them was the greatest, the most important, the best. I wonder what criteria they used to one-up each other?

Did anyone hear?

Did anyone hear Jesus say they were going to kill him?

Did anyone hear Jesus say if we are going to follow him, we have to be ready to die, too? (Mark 8:34-35)

Did anyone hear Jesus say if we are not even willing to die, if we do not

give up everything we have, we cannot follow him? (Luke 14:27, 33)

We say we believe Jesus speaks the truth (John 14:6) and then proceed to shove one another down the mountain so we can be king.

Not one of us

In Jesus' time, women and children were shoved down the mountain.

In Jesus' country, Samaritans and Gentiles couldn't even get to the mountain. They were despised and ridiculed and kept at the far reaches of polite society with the sinners and lepers.

Yet women and children, Samaritans and Gentiles, sinners and lepers were central to Jesus' ministry. He went out of his way to care for them. He healed them and forgave them. He put his neck on the line for them.

We're better than they are ...

Today, our women and children, our Samaritans and Gentiles, our sinners and lepers are people with different-colored skin, people with different political views, people with different languages, people who were born somewhere else, people with different buying power, people with different health, people with different preferences, people who are just plain different from us.

We cut down the different people with our words, with the way we talk about them or to them. We cut down the different people with our actions, the way we treat them or ignore them or disown them.

We say we cut down the different people because we are right and they are wrong. What we don't say is we think we are better than they are and need to cut them down so we can stay on top of the mountain.

So, we cut

We cut down the different wherever we find them.

It's one thing for us to turn our noses up at those outside the church, those who are not a part of the body of Christ, though doing so still is not acting like Christ.

It's another thing to turn our noses up at our own, to push down men and women, boys and girls who also claim Jesus is Lord but who are somehow different.

I've seen on Facebook how some of us think about others who are different. I've heard out of the mouths of some of the people in the church what they think about others who are different from them. I have seen and heard ungodly opinions about black people and brown people, poor people and rich people, gay people and promiscuous people, conservative people and liberal people—and all of it coming out of the mouths and showing up on the Facebook profiles of people who one moment heard Jesus say, "Take up your cross and deny yourself, serve each other, love each other"—people who one moment claim Jesus is Lord, and who in the next moment proclaim "truths" Jesus never preached.

The hardest part of this is admitting I have done the same thing. I have said uncharitable things about people who see the Bible differently than I do and who act on their view of the Bible in ways I don't like. I have thought I am better and smarter than they are because I don't do what they do. I have criticized these others who serve in Jesus' name because they aren't "one of us."

Put away

It's time to put away our divisive ways.

Such talk and behavior does not characterize a follower of Jesus, because Jesus said the greatest are servants of all.

Such talk and behavior does not unify the church—the body of Christ—but divides and diminishes it.

Such talk and behavior does not draw people to Jesus but drives them away and defeats the work of the church, which is to shine the light of Christ to the world so all may see our good works and praise God in heaven.

Others first

It's time to put others before ourselves.

In place of such talk and behavior, in place of trying to secure our place at the table, in place of shoving others off the mountain, we who call ourselves followers of Jesus must do like Jesus and serve one another.

- We must speak of each other with the dignity that being created in God's image demands.
- We must treat one another as Christ commands.
- We must do our work of advancing God's kingdom in the power of the Holy Spirit, serving others through love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

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