

**Changed or Not?**  
**October 16, 2021**

Have I ever told you...  
About our daughter Emily's...  
Negotiation skills.

It's been a couple years...  
But when we were...  
Back in Wisconsin.

Emily approached me...  
And asked...  
If she could borrow my car... **[1 Concert]**  
To go to a concert...  
With my friends...  
In Milwaukee...

Which immediately sent my brain...  
Into parental overdrive...  
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So I said...  
You mean Milwaukee Wisconsin...  
Which is a major US city...  
Two and a half hours away...  
From where we live.

Down the busiest interstate highway...  
In the great state of Wisconsin...

With four of your WAHOO friends...  
Who I know... will be...  
Blaring the music... way too loud...  
Singing and jumping and doing everything...  
That your friends do...

Causing you to drive distractedly...  
Because you've had your license...  
For about five minutes now...

To go to a concert that starts at 8 pm...  
Which means you'll get home...  
After 2 am... 2 in the morning...  
Central Standard Time.

Hmmm... **[2 Think]**  
Let me think.

No.  
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Then immediately...  
She made a counter offer.

Well... can I borrow the car...  
And have some money...  
To go out to eat with my friends...  
And go to a movie.

What just happened...  
We went from this extreme case scenario...  
To an incredibly reasonable request.

In the resulting whiplash...  
From the sudden change of direction...  
In a disoriented state of being...  
I said... that sounds good...  
YES.

Here are the keys...  
And my wallet.

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But later... in the silence of my soul...  
I couldn't help but think...  
I had been played.

This teenage girl...  
Really wanted money and the car...  
To go to a movie with her friends.  
The whole time...

The concert was a red herring...  
Designed to distract me...  
From the real request.

Teenagers are tricky.  
If you have one at home...  
Be careful...  
You should sleep...  
With one eye open.

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Disciples are tricky too. **[3 James and John]**  
So. Two of our friends.  
James and John...  
The sons of Zebedee...

Two of the disciples...  
Who lived and traveled and worked...  
With Jesus... day in and day out...  
These two...  
Took Jesus aside.  
For a private moment...  
To ask him a private question.

They say...  
Lord... we want you to do for us...  
Whatever we ask of you.

And maybe it's because...  
We had five daughters.

But when someone approaches me...  
With this kind of tone...  
I know... it's not good.  
They are working...  
With some kind of ulterior motive...  
With some hidden agenda.

That I don't understand...  
That more than likely...  
Is taking advantage of a situation.

They want something.  
And if they can't just ask...  
Straight out...

Chances are...  
They know it's wrong.

My instant answer would have been... NO.  
I absolutely will not promise...  
To do whatever you ask.  
NO WAY IN THE WORLD.

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I don't know if you noticed this...  
But Jesus... he's better than me.  
In oh so many ways.

You know...  
He's forgiving. Loving. Kind.  
All that and more.

Plus he doesn't just say... go away.  
To these ridiculously selfish myopic men.

Instead he says...  
What do you want...  
Me to do.

Well... not much.  
We just want to sit...  
At your right hand...  
And your left hand...  
In positions of power...  
And importance...  
And prestige...

When you come into your glory.  
You know... in the Kingdom of God.

Can we be important please?

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Pause. What if this story is about us.

Not in the sense...  
That we come to Jesus...  
And ask him...  
To make us important.

Not that we jockey...  
For the best positions...  
So that we can have...  
Front row seats...  
In the Kingdom of God.

Not that we believe...  
That we are the most important people...  
IN THE WHOLE STINKING WORLD.

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What if this story is about... **[4 Missing]**  
The danger of missing the point.

What if this gospel lesson is about...  
Saying that we believe in Jesus...  
With all of our heart soul and mind...

While at the same time...  
Promoting an agenda...  
That doesn't even come close...  
To being a teaching of Jesus.  
A value of the Kingdom of God.  
Something that a follower of Christ...  
Should really believe.

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I mean... you have to understand....  
That James and John...  
Wanted to be important...  
In the Kingdom of God.

And well... two things are obviously wrong with that.

First. They weren't important.  
They were just two of the twelve.  
They were part of a group. A community...  
That was called collectively by Jesus...  
To do his work.

The weren't more important than the others.  
And they weren't less important than the others.

And secondly...  
They should have understood by now...  
That Jesus did not come...  
To be served.

He was the Son of God.  
But he didn't lord his power or position...  
Over the people in this world.

He didn't come to enslave humanity...  
Make us bow down to him...  
Lick his shoes.  
Fulfill his every desire.

He didn't expect us...  
To serve him.  
He could have.  
But he didn't.

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As a matter of fact...  
Just the opposite. **[5 Serve]**  
He came to serve us.

Jesus himself said...  
At the end of this lesson.

The Son of Man did not come...  
To be served...  
But to serve.  
And to give his life...  
As a ransom for many.

Couldn't be much clearer.

Service.  
And giving away our lives...  
IS A VALUE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

It's what makes us different.

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Jesus said...

The gentiles... you know...  
The people who don't believe in God.  
The gentiles...  
Act like tyrants.  
They lord their power...  
Over other people.

It's not going to be that way with you.  
If you want to be great...  
You must be a servant.

If you want to be first  
You must be a slave to all.

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There is a man named Richard Rohr... **[6 Richard]**  
He is a Franciscan priest...

A well known popular theologian...  
And a prolific author...  
Who lives in Albuquerque New Mexico.

He spoke at synod assembly...  
A few years back...  
And was really great.

Richard Rohr said this:

Christianity is a lifestyle.  
A way of being in the world  
That is simple, non-violent, shared, and loving.

However,  
We made it into an established "religion"  
(and all that goes with that)  
And avoided the lifestyle change itself.

One could be warlike, greedy, racist, selfish, and vain  
In most of Christian history,  
And still believe that Jesus is  
One's personal Lord and Savior  
Or continue, in good standing,  
To receive the sacraments.

The world has no time fo such silliness anymore.

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These words... and this gospel lesson... **[7 Living Faith]**  
Call us... to integrate...  
The teachings of Jesus.  
The values of the Kingdom...  
Into our normal everyday life.

In other words...  
You can't say I believe in Jesus...

And then say... I deserve special treatment.  
You do not.  
You deserve to serve.  
Like everyone else who follows Jesus.

You can't say I believe in Jesus...  
And it's ok... to treat other people badly...  
With my words or actions.

It is not.  
I am called to love my enemies.  
Turn the other cheek.  
Judge not lest I be judged.  
I am called to love.

You can't say I believe in Jesus...

And live an unexamined...  
Self centered...  
Immature life.

Jesus says...  
Deny yourself.  
Die to yourself...  
Take up your cross and follow me.

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I want to end today's sermon...  
With two stories...  
Two illustrations...  
Of how to integrate...  
Our faith into our daily lives...

How to make what we believe... Real.  
Important and living.

And I would like you to play along.

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The other day a woman from our church... **[8 Starbucks]**  
Was standing in line for Starbuck's coffee.  
She placed her order.  
And they charged her a certain amount.  
The amount the cashier said... seemed too high...  
But you know... this is Starbucks...  
It's bound to cost a little more...  
Than what one would think.

When she arrived at the pickup counter...  
The barista handed her two drinks.  
They were identical.  
But more than what she had ordered.

She asked if both drinks were for her.  
The barista answered they were.  
The woman said...  
I thought it was kind of expensive.

The barista said...  
This is what you ordered.

Now. Here is the moment of decision.  
You have a choice to make.  
And how does faith...  
The faith that lives inside of you...  
Affect your outward behavior...  
Toward the world?

What would you do...  
In this situation.

**[Take answers]**

The woman turned to the next person in line.  
She asked the person behind her...  
Do you like this specific kind of drink.  
The person replied that she did.

The woman of faith...  
Gave the woman behind her... next in line...  
Her extra drink. For free.  
No strings attached.  
And walked away.  
Happy and strong.

Ok. Now the second story...

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The other day... **[9 Jeep]**  
A man from our church...  
Was getting the oil changed...  
In my... I mean his Jeep...

And there was a little sign...  
Out front of the main office...  
It read... Please be kind.  
We are shorthanded...  
And doing the best that we can.

I... I mean this man...  
Walked into the office...  
When suddenly...  
A very angry loud woman...  
Came screaming in...  
She yelled at everyone...  
And anyone... who was in the general vicinity.

She was inquiring...  
If she needed a new battery in her car or not...  
But the question was woven together...  
With a string of profanity...  
That almost made me blush.  
Almost.

I walked past...  
Through the narrow hallway...  
She did not make room for me...  
So we bumped shoulders...  
As I passed.

I said... excuse me.  
She gave me...  
A dirty look.

Then went and had a seat.  
It was 12:30 pm.

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About 3:30 pm...  
I started to get a little antsy.  
They told me... my care would be done...  
In two hours.  
It was now three.

I asked if they could let me know...  
If my car was almost done.

The young woman at the counter said...  
It would be another 45 minutes.  
And the reason was...  
They only had one technician...  
Who was qualified to work...  
On my specific vehicle.

So I waited another hour.  
That's four hours total.  
For those of you keeping track...

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I stood up...  
And politely asked for the manager.

I told him the situation.  
He apologized.  
Thanked me for understanding.  
And said he would check immediately...  
And get me going.

He walked away.  
At the same time...  
They pulled up with my car.

I was frustrated.  
And they were afraid.

What would you do?  
**[Take answers]**

I said... thank you.  
And told the young woman at the counter...  
That she had been very helpful...  
Because she had been.  
And I drove away into the sunset.

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Now listen.  
I'm not making myself out...  
To be the hero of this story.  
Because I didn't feel heroic.

I FELT frustrated.  
I FELT irritated.

I WANTED to go...  
Because I had an appointment...  
Back in my office... at church...  
And it was getting too close...

I didn't want to keep people waiting...  
And I could just feel the pressure building.

BUT Jesus has made it abundantly clear. **[10 Changed]**  
That if I choose to follow him.  
If I want to really live out...  
The truth of God's love...  
In my own life.

Then I have to become a servant.

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And who does unbridled anger serve?  
Who does a loud voice serve?  
Who does inflicting pain...  
On the people around us...  
Really serve?

Not God.  
Not other people.

It serves ourselves.  
And our own sense...  
Of being seated...  
At the right hand...  
And the left hand...  
Of Jesus...  
In his glory.

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That's not the way.

It is literally...  
Against everything...  
That Jesus taught.

It is against...  
The way that Jesus lived.

It is against...  
His mission...  
Which served us...  
To the point of death on the cross.

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So listen.  
This sermon isn't designed to make anyone feel bad.  
I am asking a very sincere question...  
Based on the gospel lesson.

The followers of Jesus... James and John...

Wanted to be important. And powerful. And the best.  
And in the process of seeking this glory...  
They missed the point...  
Of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus redirected them.  
Teaching them AGAIN...  
What is important to him.

Service.  
And love.

And in comparing his followers to the gentiles...  
He was clearly saying...  
I expect this love...  
I have for you...

To change you.  
To change how you live.  
To change how you interact in the world.  
To change how you see things.

So. Pure and simple.  
One final question today.  
For all of us.

Has the love of Jesus...  
Changed you... or not?