**Order of Service: March 19th, 2023**

**Scripture:**

 **Matthew 20:17-35**

17While going up to Jerusalem, Jesus took the twelve disciples aside privately and said to them on the way, 18“See, we are going up to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death. 19They will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked, flogged, and crucified, and on the third day he will be raised.”

20Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons approached him with her sons. She knelt down to ask him for something. 21“What do you want?” he asked her.

“Promise,” she said to him, “that these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right and the other on your left, in your kingdom.”

22Jesus answered, “You don’t know what you’re asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?”

“We are able,” they said to him.

23He told them, “You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right and left is not mine to give; instead, it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.”

24When the ten disciples heard this, they became indignant with the two brothers. 25Jesus called them over and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions act as tyrants over them. 26It must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave; 28just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

29As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. 30There were two blind men sitting by the road. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” 31The crowd demanded that they keep quiet, but they cried out all the more, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!”

32Jesus stopped, called them, and said, “What do you want me to do for you?”

33“Lord,” they said to him, “open our eyes.” 34Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they could see, and they followed him.

**Meditating on the Scriptures**

**Message: “To serve, and to give his life”**

One of the most wonderful expressions of love and service I have ever witnessed was from an older fisherman in the previous church I served at in western PEI. He and his wife had been married for years and had a number of children and grandchildren who were in and out of the house each day. They clearly loved this older couple, and I wondered what kind of life had led to this wonderful and close family.

One day when I was over for a visit, the man came in after a long day of fishing which had started at 3am, and then he had gone and helped until 5pm in the family oyster business. When he came though the door, he could have been forgiven for collapsing into the easy chair and asking for a cup of tea, but he didn’t. Instead, he immediately insisted that his wife sit down, got each of us tea, and proceeded to show me all the different rugs that his wife had made over the years.

It wasn’t flashy, it wasn’t extreme, but it was obviously a part of who he was, and how he served those that he loved. It was one of the most beautiful things I have ever witnessed.

There are few things that so quickly show love and goodness as simple acts of service for others. Taking the time to listen to what others care about, or get them a glass of water, or a cup of tea, can make all the difference. Particularly when we are not doing it to get something, or to try and earn their love, but simply because we love them. Simple service shows love because it shows that we don’t only care about the big things, but even the smallest parts of the lives of others. It shows that we don’t count ourselves as too important, or busy, or good to stoop down and pick up a piece of garbage, or change a dirty diaper, or wash dishes- when we serve, we show that the person we serve is worth our time, and our resources. We show that they are valuable.

And yet, although we have seen this so many times, and there is a way in which we know that it is true, we are so quick to forget. We can be so hard to teach, and even when we know something in our minds, we often don’t let it sink down into our hearts and through our hands.

We’re not alone in this. The disciples have just stood and listened and Jesus took them aside and told them about the horrible way that he was going to be tortured, humiliated, and killed, and they don’t seem to have much of a response at all. It’s the third time he has told them, but they still don’t seem to believe.

Even while Jesus is talking about how he will die for their sake, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, seem to have been joining forces with Mom to get her to ask Jesus if they could be the leaders of this new kingdom that Jesus had promised was coming. Right after Jesus has talked about how he will suffer and die at the hands of their religious leaders, and also the secular authorities, James and John and angling to get a promotion from “assistant disciple” to “lead disciple.”

I’m amazed at the patience of Jesus throughout this conversation. If it was me, I probably would have given them a pretty stern talking to. “Don’t you ever listen? Didn’t you just hear that I’m going to die, and all you care about is yourselves? All you care about is how much power and prestige you have? Go find someone else to follow then.” That’s what I might have said, but Jesus doesn’t.

He decides to go about it in a different way. “You don’t understand what you’re asking for.” Jesus says to them. “You don’t realise that it will mean you will also lose your lives. You will also be persecuted by the authorities. Are you ready to get the same kind of treatment that I will?” And amazingly, they still don’t seem to get it! “We’re ready!”, they say. “We know what’s coming, and we’re totally ready for it Jesus!”

It reminded me of a scene from a movie called “Ford vs. Ferrari”. Henry Ford Jr., who owns the Ford motor company, has been trying to build a car to beat out Ferrari. He hires an unorthodox, but highly talented team lead by a couple of incredible drivers. They are insisting that they have more control over the car and its design because they’re the ones who drive and know what’s going on, while the people back at head office just read about this stuff.

To give an idea of the kind of conditions and precision they’re dealing with, Carrol Shelby, one of the drivers, asks Ford to go for a drive. When Shelby asks Ford if he’s ready for it, he replies, “the name on the centre of that steering wheel should tell you that I was born ready. Hit it.”

The pedal goes to the metal, every part of his body is thrust back into the seat, and it’s hard to breathe. All that he thought he knew goes out the window and the experience of what it’s like to drive like that reduces him to tears as he whimpers, “I had no idea.” He’s spent his whole life around cars, he owns the brand, he’s watched it all, but he still didn’t really know what it meant to experience it. Perhaps this is where the disciples found themselves, and where we often find ourselves. We know the right answers, we’ve grown up and lived around Christianity, but maybe we haven’t experienced what it means to follow Jesus to the fullest.

Jesus promises the two eager brothers that they will indeed drink from the same cup that he does and experience all that he will, but they don’t understand yet that he’s talking about his persecution and death. But Jesus doesn’t promise them, or us, all that we hope and dream for in this life. In fact, he promises that we will experience hardships, and difficulties, and persecution. Jesus isn’t a shortcut to the easy life. But he is the way to the good life.

Perhaps understandably, all this talk of ruling gets the other disciples a bit upset. They also wouldn’t mind being the ones in charge, and they resent that James and John have tried to cut the line. But before the argument over who is the greatest can start back up, Jesus again reorients them to just how different his kingdom is to the way that the world works.

In our world ruling means controlling and becoming a tyrant over others in some way or another. It’s about being able to do what we want, when we want, to whomever we want. It’s about power. But Jesus says that his kingdom is completely different. To be number one in Jesus’ kingdom means to humble ourselves and serve others. It means giving up our rights and the things we deserve, and becoming compelled to serve other people with all that we have. It’s not what most of us naturally look for.

For a number of years, I worked at Camp Seggie, and would watch with great interest as people who had served as cabin leaders would move into roles of leadership. Leadership came with new freedoms, and new authority, and it was fascinating to see the people who took that responsibility and cared for others with it, and those who used it for their own advantage. Even some who had the best intentions got caught up in how nice it was to be able to just tell people to do what you wanted and have them listen. It took a lot of self-control and care to not just take advantage of the perks and sit back and relax.

Jesus reminds his disciples that this isn’t just a nice idea, or a concept to Jesus, it’s how he lives. In everything that Jesus does, he is serving others. He is putting them first, caring for their needs, and doing what is best for them, even when it costs him dearly. Jesus didn’t come to earth so that people could wait on him hand and foot and give him the things that he wanted. Jesus didn’t come to squeeze something out of us, he came to serve us.

Jesus came because he was willing to give up everything- even his life- so that we could be free from the power and control of death and sin. Jesus came to serve those who could never hope to pay him back, because his love is a true love.

In the same way that we forgive others because Jesus has already forgiven us, we also serve others because Jesus served us first. His deep and humble service is far more than anything we could imagine, and it’s a call to a different kind of life. It’s a call to a different kind of kingdom. One where the greatest isn’t the one who uses it to control or take advantage of others but serves them.

This isn’t what most of us really want to hear. The disciples don’t really want to hear it either. It isn’t the first time that Jesus has brought it up. It’s certainly not the first time that he has tried to re-shape their understanding of what it means to be the greatest, but they pick and choose from what he says. They like the part where they get to inherit a big kingdom, and everything will be good, but they miss the part that comes before.

We like the part about ruling and blessings, but we often skip over the promises of persecution and trouble. The parts about humbling ourselves and taking the low place of a servant.

If we come to Jesus only trying to get what we want, we will likely walk away empty handed and disappointed. But if we come to Jesus with a heart to serve him, and listen to him, we will realise that we have been given far more than we could ever imagine.

Jesus brings all of this into the real world as he and the disciples are leaving Jericho, on the way to Jerusalem. We have already witnessed time and time again that Jesus spends time on those that everyone else thinks are a lost cause. Last week it was the children, and today it’s two blind men who are crying out, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” The crowds try to shut them up, but they won’t listen. They cry out all the more, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” And as he has done each time before, Jesus stops. These two men may be physically blind, but even so, they have seen what everyone else seems to be missing.

They know who Jesus really is. That word, “Lord” wasn’t just used for anyone. It was used for the king, and more specifically for God. Theses two men that everyone else thinks can’t see anything know that Jesus is the one they have been waiting for. They believe that he will stop, and that he will listen. And despite the best efforts of the crowds, they are right. Jesus does stop, and Jesus does listen. “What do you want?” Jesus asks. The last time he asked this question, he had a mother jockeying for her son’s position, but this time, the men reply, “open our eyes!”

And the irony of this is that Jesus has already given them the gift to see. They have seen who he is and recognised him even without their sight. Jesus has compassion on them. He cares for them, and he serves them in the best way that he can: he heals them. Jesus sees the lost. Jesus sees the broken. Jesus sees the sick. Jesus sees the overlooked. Jesus sees the silenced. And in a world that says, “Go away! Stop wasting valuable time with your problems!” Jesus says, “What do you want?”

As we can see from the two requests, Jesus doesn’t always just give us what we want. But he does give us what is best for us. Jesus tells the first ones who ask that he won’t guarantee that they will have the power that they hope for, but that they will join in all that it means to be a follower of Jesus. But the ones who want to see not only receive the gift of seeing, they also receive the much greater gift of being seen.

Jesus wants us to know that his kind of service is quite different from the world. He doesn’t prioritize his time to include the rich and the famous and the talented first, and everyone else later. He takes the most time with those who others look down on, or who cannot help themselves. His death on the cross was no accident. It wasn’t an unfortunate mistake that he was able to work through, it is the very reason that he came to earth.

He came to serve us. He came to save us. And he came to bring a kingdom that turned the priorities of the world right-side-up. As we serve the most hopeless, and the ones who have the least to give us, we begin to understand the very heart of our God and his great love for us, and what it means to follow him.

Thanks be to God!