

A New Way of Life

A Sermon by James R. Newby

Text: Mark 10:35-45

James and John have the audacity to ask that each of them might sit beside Jesus, when, in the words of Scripture, he enters his glory—one on his right and one on his left. And when the other ten disciples hear about this, they become angry. Who do these two think they are?

Now, as angry as we may feel towards those who jump in line ahead of us, like James and John, they are not the only ones who have missed the point of Jesus' words in the scripture reading I just read. The response of Jesus to the anger of the *other ten* reveals that they have missed the point as well. Jesus called ALL the disciples together and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles, those whom they recognize as their ruler, lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ***It shall not be so among you.***"

It shall not be so among you. In this statement we find Jesus' declaration of a profound hope for his disciples. In these seven brief words is a radical vision of an alternative reality. The disciples had just argued amongst themselves only a chapter prior to what I just read, about who is the greatest among them. And James and John have now beaten them to the chase. Jesus' response, however, is

very much the same in both instances. “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be a servant to all.”

You see, Jesus envisions a wholly different conception of *power*, which has been a favorite theme of mine recently. Jesus imagines for his disciples a radically different community, in which power is conceived and enacted in alternative practices. It is a vision that stretches our imaginations to the limit. It requires a break from the ways the world has conceived and envisioned the practices of power—from the ways we have become accustomed to what the world has taught us **to see**, taught us **to be**, and taught us **to act**. For 350 years, the Quakers have sought to live into an alternative reality through their testimonies...Like Jesus, they envisioned a whole new way of life.

With the words, “It shall not be so among you,” Jesus invites his followers into a way of living, a way of being, and a way of acting that *transforms* life as we know it. Rather than vying for power...Rather than scrambling for prestige...Rather than all of our scraping for recognition and admiration...Rather than the constant acts of comparison in order to gauge our own rank or significance...Rather than seeking to outshine others through our witty criticisms and clever put-downs of their work, Jesus pleads, “It shall not be so among you.”

Lording it over others—*It shall not be so among you.* Vying to be the first, the best at the cost of others—*It shall not be so among you.* Belittling a colleague to make yourself look better—*It shall not be so among you.* Secretly rejoicing at the failure of another, especially when it boosts your image—*It shall not be so among you.*

What would it look like to genuinely rejoice in the achievements of a colleague, without having to immediately measure your own achievements alongside his or hers? What might it look like to be a person who is in a position of power, but who enacts that power by serving others and empowering others? What would it look like for a leader to gain satisfaction by seeing others thrive in their gifts? To be a leader who genuinely seeks the honor of others? **It would be much more like the community that Jesus envisioned.**

An important query to ask would be: *Are we so intent upon arriving, reaching some destination, attaining some goal, that we fail to see those around us? That we fail to care for and honor those around us?*

A moving and inspirational story which I have shared with you before, helps to illustrate my message this morning. The story goes like this: **At a fund-raising dinner for a school that serves physically challenged children, the father of one of these children told the following story...Shaya and his father had**

walked past a park where some boys Shaya knew were playing baseball.

Shaya asked, “Do you think they will let me play?” His father knew that most boys would not want him on their team, but the father also knew it would mean a lot if they let him play. So his father approached one of the boys on the field and asked if Shaya could play. The boy looked around for guidance from his teammates. Getting none, he took matters into his own hands and said, “We are losing by six runs, and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team, and I will try to put him up to bat in the ninth inning.”

By the time of the bottom of the ninth inning, Shaya’s team had caught up. Now, with two outs and bases loaded, the potential winning run was on base. Shaya was scheduled to be the next at-bat. Would the team actually let him bat? Surprisingly, Shaya was given the bat. Everyone knew that he didn’t even know how to hold the bat properly, much less connect with the ball.

However, as Shaya stepped up to the plate, the pitcher moved a few steps to lob the ball in softly so Shaya could at least be able to make contact. The first pitch came and he swung clumsily and missed. The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly towards Shaya. As the pitch came in, Shaya swung at the ball and hit a slow ground ball to the pitcher. The pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could easily have thrown it to the first baseman. Shaya would have been out and that would have been the end of the

game. Instead, the pitcher took the ball and threw it on a high arc to right field, far beyond reach of the first baseman. Everyone started yelling, “Shaya, run to first...Run to first.” He scampered down the baseline, and everyone started to yell, “Run to second...Run to second!”

By the time that Shaya was rounding first base, the right fielder had the ball. He could have thrown the ball to the second baseman for a tag. But the right fielder understood what the pitcher’s intentions had been, so he threw the ball high and far over the third baseman’s head. As Shaya reached second base, the opposing shortstop ran to him, turned him in the direction of third base, and shouted, “Run to third!” As Shaya rounded third, the boys from both teams were screaming, “Shaya, run home!” Shaya ran home, stepped on home plate and was cheered for winning the game.

“That day,” said the father softly, and with tears in his eyes, “the boys from both teams helped bring a piece of the Divine Plan into this world.”

Imagine it. If we learned to live into God’s vision of a community that sought to outdo one another in showing the other honor, it would transform life as we know it, at every level.