

“Serving with Your Gifts”

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Fifth in a series about Discipleship Practices

Mark 10.32-45

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They are marching on Jerusalem. That's the centre of power. It is the home of kings, the hub of commerce, the heartbeat of the nation, and the house of God. Jerusalem, the City of David. They see God's Messiah going there: the new David, the saviour, the liberator, the vindicator, the future and final ruler of God's People. They have every confidence in Jesus.

They are at the head of the parade, the vanguard of the new order, marching to glory. Let's not be surprised, then, when brothers James and John ask for pride of place in Jesus' kingdom. They have been with Jesus since the beginning. Along with Peter, they've been Jesus' inner circle. They've seen Jesus' glory as no others have.¹ So the right-hand and left-hand prime places beside the throne, senior cabinet positions in the new government . . . of course they assume such spots will be theirs.

The other disciples are furious at James and John for asking. My hunch is they are angry that they didn't think of asking first.

II

Jesus seems disappointed. They've been with him for so long, but don't get the first thing about him.

You heard what they had heard, but failed to understand. It was the third time Jesus had warned them.² His way ahead was leading to betrayal, condemnation, mockery, humiliation, torture and death. Yes, resurrection too, but only after all that. A strange glory! It was Jesus way, the Way. From the very beginning it was the destination of Jesus' vocation.³

James, John and the others heard it too, but didn't get it. Who would? Imagine the world's King and Saviour choosing the Servant way?

III

Jesus is God the Servant. He says to James, John, the others, and us: "Follow me."

These weeks, we are looking at 6 core activities that the Spirit uses to form us for following

¹ See Mark 1.16-20; 5.37ff; 9.1-8.

² See Mark 8.27-38 and 9.30-37.

³ Tom Wright, Mark for Everyone (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 139ff.

Jesus. Jamie Holtom and Debbie Johnson talk about these in their book Bullseye.⁴

They are:

Using Spiritual Practices
Worshipping Together Weekly
Discovering Authentic Community
Serving with Our Gifts
Giving Generously
Sharing Christ

These activities are bullseye-targets we aim for. We will miss. We will come close. Practising more and more, we might hit the bullseye. We are not measured against perfection. The goal is growth: growing in the way of Jesus.

Jesus is our Master. He teaches us, with his own life, to “*Serve with Our Gifts*.” That’s our bullseye.

IV

We need to realize some things. First, realize this: **Jesus has started a movement, and we are part of it.**⁵

He invites you to be part of what he is doing to set the world to rights. God is transforming everything — all of creation, all peoples and all nations, all communities and all relationships, all of us, starting in the depths of each human heart. God is making all things new. You are part of this transforming work, following Jesus, for all the world.

Jesus shows us the very character of God. He shows us what God is like. In Jesus, “*God chose to come as a servant.*”⁶ God’s way is to serve.

The world’s way is to dominate and defeat, to gain power and control, to use and, often, abuse. This is the world Jesus came to save from itself, the world he came to transform.

Jesus does this by serving. This is God’s way. He calls us to it too.

“If you want to be first and best and make the most difference, simply find a way to serve.”⁷

Jesus has started a movement of servants. You are part of it.

⁴ Jamie Holtom and Debbie Johnson, Bullseye: Aiming to Follow Jesus (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2015).

⁵ Ibid, 86.

⁶ Ibid, 83.

⁷ Ibid, 84.

V

Now, realize this: **Everyone has been gifted uniquely by God.**⁸

Jamie and Debbie write, *“The people who respond to Christ’s vision are equipped for Christ’s mission!”*⁹ However it is that Jesus calls you to serve, he gives you whatever you need to serve well.

The New Testament has various lists of these gifts.¹⁰ These are more than just things you are good at, talents you were born with. They are interests, abilities, inclinations, and strengths God is giving you.

The Spirit plants these gifts in each one for the benefit of everyone. Serving is using your God-given gifts to bless others. That’s why no one has all the gifts. Each of us has one of them, perhaps a few. God does this so we have to depend on each other. God gives these gifts to build up the community of God’s People, so together we can serve with Jesus in the world.

You are uniquely gifted by God. Share your gifts. Serve.

VI

Now, realize this: **We get life when we serve and use these gifts for Christ.**¹¹

The National Basketball Association has an ad campaign. It shows the incredible things those athletes can do. They call this campaign, “Where amazing happens.”¹²

Serving alongside Jesus, using your gifts, you will see amazing things happen.

Often the world won’t think they are amazing, but you will know better. Sometimes it won’t even believe they happen. But you will see. You will be amazed. You’ll be filled with life. Jesus’ life.

Jesus is our rabbi, our teacher, our Master. Not only does he give us information and inspiration. Jesus gives us a life. Our life. Our full life. Our true life. Our glorious life. Our life’s purpose. Our life, which is his life. Jesus’s life: given to us, given for us, filling us, alive in us.

This is the Way Jesus invites us to travel with him. It’s the Way of serving, because it is the Way of God. Because it’s the Way of God, it’s the Way of life.

⁸ Ibid, 87.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ For example, see the lists in Romans 12.6-8, 1st Corinthians 12.8-10, 28-30, and Ephesians 4.1-11.

¹¹ Holtom and Johnson, 88.

¹² Ibid.

VII

You don't need to be one of those very few spectacular athletes to do this, because the Spirit of Christ dwells within you.

You can serve coffee.

You might think making someone a cup of coffee is something anyone can do. Instead, imagine a conversation like this. It's a minister talking with someone in her congregation.

Tony, I've seen how you are with people, and I think the Spirit of Christ has given you the gift of hospitality. One way you can use that gift is being part of our congregation's hospitality ministry. Sure, there are some practical parts to this: you have to get here early on Sunday, make coffee, serve it and clean up afterwards.

But here is what you're really doing. You have the potential to reach people. Someone who isn't sure whether this is a community they can be part of, or whether they fit in, or whether anyone would want them here if they knew what was going on in their life. You've made the coffee. You see them standing alone. You bring them the coffee with your warm smile and you make a connection: 'Hi, I'm Tony. May I serve you a coffee today?' You've extended to them God's hospitality, an invitation to them to know they are not alone and are cared about.¹³

And not just in within our church community. There are many other places where you can use this gift. Our township's weekly community dinners, for instance. You could even work at a coffee shop, realizing it's not 'just a job' but also a calling to serve where Jesus is serving.

Serving coffee, the gift of hospitality, just one of the gifts the Spirit gives.

What is the target you can be aiming at?

Well, start with the gifts God has given you. Then ask, "How can I serve?" When you do that, you will find Jesus, serving with you.

Then, watch amazing happen!

Amen.

¹³ Adapted from Holtom and Johnson, 84f.