

How do I balance responsibilities and goals against demands and needs of others? How do I respond when others don't measure up to my expectations? Is my first thought to get my way or see how I might help someone else? Am I first and foremost a servant, or am I more concerned about how others meet my needs?

In this section of Mark, three times Jesus outlines the price of his Messiahship. He said, "I will suffer, die, be buried and come back to life – for you!" And three times his disciples said, "That's nice, but let's talk about ME." First, Peter rebuked Jesus. Then they argued about who was the greatest. And James and John quietly demanded "front row seats."

Lest we become too critical, how often do we find that we are more preoccupied with "me" than in simply being a disciple and letting Jesus lead? How often are my feelings, needs, and control more important than someone next to me?

Jesus came to suffer and serve – in love. But his disciples selfishly were all "mixed up!" Jesus' throne would be a cross; his crown would be thorns, and his palace a tomb! He announced that he was a different kind of king, not one who sat on a throne to be served, but who was willing to kneel in the dust and wash his disciples' feet. He was born to enter our place of death, so he could turn such darkness into the beginning of new life! This was the "*cup he was to drink and the baptism which he would be immersed in ...*"

Years ago, there was an American journalist who went to China to visit a Catholic hospital. For over an hour, he watched one nun clean gangrenous sores on a dying woman. Later he remarked, "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars." She smiled and said, "Neither would I." That is "servant love!" That nun understood true greatness comes from true love.

At Baptism, each of us was touched with the sign of Christ's cross and called to share that same cross in every touch we make. Jesus said, "To serve, to love, and to surrender IS the place of honor." This IS what life in the kingdom is all about.

I have been humbled over the years as I have watched adoptive parents continue to love children who gave them nothing but grief, when it would have been easy to say, "this isn't fair and simply walk away!" I have watched husbands and wives spend hour after hour, week after week, year after year caring for spouses with Alzheimer's or dementia. They get little sleep, create their own health issues, and do nothing but to serve the one whom they have promised to love no matter what. I have watched so many of you give thousands of hours in ministry, with no recognition, no reward, and no spotlight, for no other reason than you want to share the love of Jesus in the best way you knew how.

That is point of today's Gospel. Discipleship is about being servants rather than snobs; about sacrifice rather ego; about being foot-washers rather than people who expect to be lifted up with praise and earthly honor. What good news in a lonely, selfish, hurting world!

What parent has not cleaned dirty diaper after dirty diaper or stayed up all night with a sick child? What reward is there in that, except the reward of loving someone special? Well, we are called to share that same love, for the same reason, with everyone we meet! We do so as thanksgiving for the unbelievable gifts and opportunities with which we have been entrusted. And we do so as we understand our role in modeling that love so that Christ, and not me is given glory.

There is a church in England that has sign over only door to sanctuary which says "servants' entrance" ... there is no other way to get in! What a powerful message! If you want to worship, you must first accept the fact that you are not a lord or lady but a servant! That is the point Jesus was trying to make with his disciples. And it was a lesson that they learned well, and because of their sacrifices, we know of Jesus today!

One day we went to visit my parents at the vacation spot they had rented on the beach in Traverse City. Our kids were playing in the sand, and my eight-year-old daughter, Katie, saw a solitary duckling with a damaged eye and hurt leg that was being pecked at by sea gulls. She wanted to pick it up and put it in the bathtub in grandma's room, but I didn't want to be bothered, and felt "nature should take its course." After her persistence, we noticed a family of ducks about 50 yards out from the beach, and I helped her carry the duckling to the water. It immediately swam to its mother, and she and the rest of her brood quickly swam away. And so, I learned a lesson from a little girl who (at least on this day) decided "it's not all about me."

Granted, that scene on the beach was only about a little duck, and not something as important as a dying mom, but when life is not "about me" it is interesting how that changes how we look and respond to the world around me. Just contrast that story with the disciples arguing about who gets to sit on the throne, and you get the point.

Faith in Jesus is "not about me," but is celebrating the honor we have been given to enter his kingdom "as a servant." We are called not to be lifted up, but to stoop and serve!

Pay attention as you go home; for you can only leave this property by first encountering a STOP sign, with another sign below. That second sign says, "You are now entering the mission field." Like a church in England with a sign that says "the servants' entrance" we are reminded that baptism sends us daily into a life of servant love.

What a reminder that worship doesn't end as we leave this building but is only beginning, as daily we are privileged to join in the foot washing, servant love of Jesus!