

## “We Are In This Thing Together: Every One a Minister”

Matthew 20:20-28

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As Jesus and the disciples traveled to Jerusalem for the annual Passover festival, the Master predicts for the third time that he will die there at the hands of the Romans (Gentiles), the chief priests and scribes of the Temple (Matthew 20:17-19). Immediately following this prediction, in the gospel of Mark's version of this story, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approach Jesus to petition for their appointment to sit at Jesus' right and left hand, above the other disciples, when he takes the throne of his kingdom over and (Mark 10:35-45).

They had no idea what they were asking. Jesus asks "are you able to drink the cup that I drink or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (Mark 10:38). With bravado they respond, "We are able." Even after three years as Jesus' disciples, and all of his preaching and miracles, they don't have a clue what his kingdom is all about; nor do they realize that they will share his cup and baptism. By tradition, both will die martyr's deaths for the Christian kingdom.

Only in Matthew's version of the story about the disciples do we hear the mother of the sons of Zebedee mentioned. In our text this morning, she is the one who brings the request for her sons to sit at Jesus' right and left hand of authority. But before we dismiss her as a pushy show-business mom, or question whether the writer Matthew has "mother issues," wait... we'll hear more about her later.

What ensues from all of this is a loud dispute among the disciples about who is the greatest of them all.

You'll remember from Sunday school that the Zebedee family were in the fishing business on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, based in or near the village of Capernaum, home to the disciples Simon Peter, James, John, Matthew the tax collector. It would be the village that Jesus called home after John the Baptist had been arrested (Matthew 4:12-13). The stories about this family suggest that they were "people of means;" they owned at least one boat and nets and when his sons go off to follow Jesus, their father is left with the "hired servants" (Mark 1:20).

Much like today's conventional wisdom, in Jesus' time greatness was measured by fame, money and power. Those benchmarks of success would have been very familiar for the Zebedee clan.

In promoting Jesus as "Messiah," ("Christ" in Greek) most of the disciples were expecting that by God's intervention or human military struggle, Jesus was about to lead a revolution that would remove the Roman occupation out of Israel and restore the greatness of King David's fame, money and power. In spite of the fact that Jesus tells them three times that for him to be Messiah he must suffer and die, the disciples just didn't get it.

They had to be skeptical when Jesus said to them, in effect, "In my Kingdom, we will not Lord it over each other. If you want to be great, you have to be a servant of all, because in the end, that is why I am here; to be a servant and give my life away for the benefit of all."

As shallow and ego-centered as the disciples were in this dispute, please note that Jesus needed them to be there more than ever. They are about to enter Jerusalem, share their Last Supper together and in his resurrection, give birth to the movement that we still celebrate today.

We affirm that Jesus is the incarnation of divinity (John 1:14-18). He will walk on water, turn water into wine, and yet from the beginning, he gathers a motley crew of disciples to fulfill his mission - a community that will literally change the world after his death and resurrection.

One of the central tenants of the Protestant faith is the doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers." It suggests that all who are baptized are called to a ministry within the life of the church. All of us. The ordained are set apart for specialized ministry, but as a result we are not "superior human beings." After a long and arduous testing period of our gifts and dedication, the church has simply designated us to do significant work. But by ordination we are not "closer" to God than anyone else. [I once mentioned this to an elected church leader in a former church and her response was, "Well, why then are we paying you?!"]

We are all in this thing together. We are each called to our own expression of ministry, whatever it may be. We need each other, to find that calling and express it, to support and encourage each other when we are down, to hold each other accountable when we blow it. If we want to be great in God's kingdom, we are called to be servants of all. To be "servants of all," we need each other, just as the Son of God needed his own community, even when they stumbled and got it wrong.

We are all in this thing together.

As we go into the Open Enrollment period for our GroupLife small group ministry, it's not just another program to do, but rather but as a church "it's how we do life." It is in small groups that we find ourselves and the support we need to grow in our faith and service to the world.

I'd like to ask one of our young leaders in the church, Kristina Sinks, Starfire member and recently elected Secretary of our Church Council, to say a few words about the impact GroupLife participation has had on her life:

[Kristina....]

Good morning! My name is Kristina Sinks; I am sixteen years old and I am a junior at Monta Vista High School. I'd like to share a bit about the impact that being involved in GroupLife has had on my life and my faith.

I first joined a small group about a year ago. The group, called Voices, was a group of about 8 high school girls from Starfire and was led by Pastor Cate and Marissa and Brianna Conway. The mission of the group, as Marissa stated, was “to focus on issues that face high school girls, such as peer pressure and self esteem issues, and educate and empower those participating in this group to let go of outside pressure and embrace their amazing selves for exactly who they are.” We discussed topics like body image and self-esteem, human trafficking awareness, and competition between women. It was an opportunity to talk about the pressures that society places on teenage girls, but more than that, it was a community of people willing to hold each other accountable.

Somewhere between speaking out against degrading ads on social media and exploring ways to combat human trafficking, the people in the group went from being acquaintances to being some of my closest friends.

Then, a couple months after Voices started, I became involved in my mom’s small group. In December, my mom hosted one of the group’s dinner meetings. They were all eating, and I was around, so they invited me to eat with them... and then... I was in the group!

The next time we gathered as a group was to serve at Hope's Corner, which is a partnership between our church and Trinity United Methodist Church in Mountain View, where breakfast is provided to hungry people every Saturday morning. Since then, I've felt called to volunteer with Hope's Corner more often, as a way of living out my faith.

In June, Fara Brock from the small group, who was also the church council secretary, sent an email to the group saying that her term was coming to an end and they were looking for a new secretary. Long story short - now I am the church council secretary, which is really cool because again, it's a way of living out my faith and serving my church.

As a side note, there is a church council meeting today in Creekside C&D at 12:45! All church members are invited!

Anyway - The very best thing about this small group, to me, is that I'm 16 and these people are grandmothers and successful business people and young adults and teachers and... they want to hear what I have to say... And I want to hear my mother's opinion on things... Miracles happen in small groups.

As Pastor Mark says, even Jesus needed his disciples; even the human incarnation of God shared meals with his small group and was in kinship with them. How much more, then, do we need this kinship?

It is in the small groups I've been involved in – where I have developed my closest friendships, lived out my faith by serving others and the church, felt listened to and learned to listen... it is in these groups that I feel that kinship is the deepest.

Thank you!

Thank you so much!

Remember the mother of James and John? Our text this morning introduces us to the mother of the Zebedee family in an awkward moment in her life. She was simply following the conventional wisdom of her day, hoping the best for her sons, advocating for their success in life. [You know what I mean, paying for their SAT tutoring, pushing her kids to take more AP classes and spending a fortune on trips to visit prospective university campuses.] But she couldn't know then what she would know in only a few more days.

The gospel suggests that her name was Salome. She travelled with Jesus throughout his earthly ministry and was one of the women present at the crucifixion. (Mark 15:40/Matthew 27:55-56). Her sons weren't there but she was. She would be there to assist the others in the final preparations of Jesus body on Easter morning (Mark 16:1?). Her sons weren't there at the empty tomb, either. Out of fear that what had happened to Jesus might

happen to them, they were on their way back to their fishing business in the Galilee. (John 21:2)

She will be mentioned by name in the Gospel of Thomas and other non-canonical gospels as "a disciple" of Jesus; an active leader of the early church in its beginnings. What an amazing transformation she experienced as a result of following Jesus. The Kingdom Jesus proclaimed was based on an entirely different hierarchy and mission. The status of ancient kingdoms was measured by power, fame and wealth. Jesus turns that upside down, where the greatest is the least, where power is found in giving away, not acquiring. Adjusting to those expectations is not easy. It wasn't then and it isn't today!

"If you want to be great in God's kingdom, you've got to be a servant of all." Somehow in spite of conventional wisdom, Mrs. Zebedee got it and found her life calling as a disciple. One thing we can know without a doubt is that she didn't become a "servant of all" by herself. Just like Jesus, from the beginning, she was with others, interacting, serving, supporting and learning.

We are each and everyone of the baptized called to a ministry. It can be found in a myriad of forms and expressions. But it is never found alone. We are all in this thing together.

Amen.