

**Text:**

Matthew 20.20-28

**Big Picture:**

Even after explaining to his disciples that the greatest must be like a child, the disciples...and their mother...still wrestle with what this really means. Once again, followers of Jesus are reminded that to live like Jesus is to live counter to norms and at times, it is costly.

**Preparing for the Lesson:**

The passage we are looking at today comes in the midst of a section that helps to sharpen the focus of the true requirements of following Jesus. We hear more teaching about divorce, another example of the importance of being like a child, and an example of money and how having it can obstruct people's ability to follow Jesus. Chapter 20 opens with a parable that dramatically explains how the first shall be last.

It is interesting to me that the mother of James and John (the sons of Zebedee) makes the request to Jesus that her sons be seated on his right and left. Perhaps this is the first example we have of helicopter parents in action. They appear to be present when she makes this request, so perhaps they put her up to it. Whatever the case, Jesus quickly dispels any notion that he has the right to offer a privileged place to the two. In fact, Jesus will say, your desire should not be for the lofty places, but rather, that you will be the least—you will be a servant.

Jesus does not define exactly what it means to be a slave for others. I suspect that his definition would have been very broad. He does, however, indicate that doing so means the loss of your life. Those who know the story of Jesus understand that when Jesus talks about losing his life, he is not being figurative. The disciples may have initially missed this, but they eventually understand once they see his death. For us, following Jesus may include the loss of our life, but it more likely applies to us figuratively, rather than literally. In some ways, this may actually be more difficult. You know when you have given up your life for someone if death is the result. You do not always know where the line is drawn when you try to live for others, yet still continue to have your life. The challenge for us today, I think, is to determine just what exactly does it mean to give our life as Jesus calls us to do.

**Possible Lesson Outline:**

Begin your group time by asking your group to compare one another's shirts and determine who has the "nicest" shirt. (You may define nicest in any way you would like.) Continue the conversation by asking:

- Any one want to admit that you compare or at least evaluate what others are wearing when come into a room of people?
- What other ways do we often compare one another in attempt to determine who is the best at that particular thing or subject?
- Why do you think we do this?

Ask discussion questions.

Close with a time of prayer.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Why would this woman ask Jesus if her sons could sit at his left and right? Was this an absurd question or does it actually make sense to make such a request? In what ways do we ask similar questions on behalf of our own children?
2. Describe in your own words the response of Jesus to “Mrs. Zebedee.” What is significant about his response? How do you think he thought James and John would respond to his question for them? How do you think you would have responded?
3. What does it say about God that he is the only one who can prepare a place on his right and left? What does it say about our understanding of faith that James and John (and ourselves, too often) are concerned about being on Jesus’ right and left? In what ways do we attempt to position ourselves as greatest, or perhaps assume we are at least top tier in the faith? How do you think we learned to think this way?
4. How would you respond if you were a disciple of Jesus and heard a co-disciple make a request like James and John did? Why is their response normal? Why is it so easy for us to be concerned about how we compare to other people and more importantly, to be concerned that others do not get more than their fair share?
5. When Jesus says that those who want to be great must be servants, what do you think he had in mind? What examples of service have we seen from Jesus up to this point in the Gospel of Matthew? What have we yet to see from him?
6. This story comes in the midst of several that instruct Jesus’ followers what it means to be a follower of him, and the challenges that are a part of following him. Why is following Jesus so tough? Why does the cost of discipleship seem so high?
7. Given that Jesus says we should be servants or slaves, giving our life for others, what specific ways can we be servants this week? How can we as a group serve someone?

### **This Week:**

We are once again faced with a challenge to live out the words Jesus gives us. This week spend time being a servant for others, giving yourself for them. Come back prepared to share how you did that and the results of your focus on service.

### **What’s Next:**

Next week’s section is Matthew 21.1-22.46. One Groups will be looking at 22.34-46.