

1 Ways that are upside-down....servant leadership

AIM: To reflect on the nature of Jesus' leadership

Activity: 15 minutes of fame

Gather newspaper and magazine cuttings of famous people- at the time of writing these might include "Posh and Becks and baby Cruz", the Oscar contenders, or stars from some of the soaps.

Ask participants to choose one picture and talk about what fame might mean to the person they have chosen.

Looking at the text

On the way to villages in the area of Caesarea Philippi Jesus asks His disciples "Who do people say that I am?" (Mark 8:27) The disciples report differing views. Some people were saying that Jesus was John the Baptist, others Elijah, and others one of the prophets. But when Jesus makes the question personal "But who do you say that I am?" (8:29), it is the impetuous, forthright Peter who confesses "You are the Messiah" (8:29) Straight away Jesus begins to teach the disciples about the Cross.

Not long after this, two disciples come to ask Jesus for a favour. James and John had been with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:2f) and perhaps that first hand experience of Jesus' glory influences their request, they want to share some of the glory that they had seen.

Read: Mark 10: 35-40

Point to Ponder

Put yourself in Peter's shoes. Think about some of the events leading up to James and John's requests- the conversation with Jesus in Caesarea Philippi, the events you experienced on the Mount of Transfiguration.

- How would you have felt when you heard about their request to Jesus "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left in your glory?" (10:37)

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- Why would you have felt like this?

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When the other disciples hear about James and John's request they are angry (10:41) so Jesus gathers them together and talks straight about His upside-down Kingdom.

Read: Mark 10: 42-45

Jesus begins with their context. The leaders with which the disciples were familiar had a particular leadership style. They "exercise authority from above downwards" Scholars tell us that the Greek verb used here is found no-where else in the New Testament or in any other Greek literature that has survived so it may well have been coined for this occasion. The primary concerns of these "leaders" are glory and self-interest. They lead so that they come to prominence. Their aim in leadership is that they might prosper.

"But it is not so among you" (10:43)

Yet again (see 8:33) the disciples are being challenged to live in accordance with the values of God's Kingdom. Yet again they must recognise that these values run against the patterns they see and are familiar with in the society around them. Just note how hard it is for the disciples to grasp this teaching. We talk easily about an "upside-down Kingdom" but this is not easy teaching, and not easy to live by. At Caesarea Philippi Peter had confessed that Jesus is the Christ or Messiah. Now he and the other disciples struggle to understand what it means to follow this Jesus, and they really do struggle! They seem to be grasping truth and then forget, again and again.

“But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10: 43-45)

What does this “servant leadership” look like?

1. *Jesus is not teaching that Christians cannot exercise authority.* (see Mark 13: 34-36) He is teaching about the way in which authority is to be exercised. Christians are not to lead in a self-promoting or status directed way. For Jesus authority is to be exercised on behalf of others, and greatness is measured by the service one is able to render. Servant leadership then means putting ourselves aside (Philippians 2: 5-7). That does not mean that we cannot gracefully express firm opinions!

2. *Servant leadership operates best in communities of trust* Notice how often the phrase “among you” appears in verses 42-44. Who is the group that gathered round Jesus that day? According to the social, religious and political structure of the time they were an impossible group, a former collaborator with the Romans alongside those who may have been part of a Jewish resistance movement, those known in high-priestly families along with those who were poor. Humanly speaking an impossible group demanding dictatorial leadership, but in reality a reconciled community, learning to love each other, marked by a spirit of service.

The leadership we embody as well as our life together as “church” is to be a sign of God’s Kingdom.

Point to Ponder

How can you support the ministry of those who lead?

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3. Jesus does not teach with words alone. The teacher leads by example, and more than that the teacher is also the Redeemer. He gives “His life as a ransom for many”. This is vital for us to understand. Christians have a part to play, - we are called to follow. But everything does not depend on us, or on our effort. Its all about Jesus.

Points to Ponder

How do you think James and John felt when Jesus finished speaking?

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Can you think of someone who was a servant leader? What were they like?

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On his first Sunday in a new congregation one minister said “I am your servant, but you are not my Master”. What do you think was meant by that?

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What might our leadership look like if we had that in mind?

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Hymns/Songs

Meekness and majesty
The servant King

Activity

When ministers are ordained they receive a Bible to symbolise their calling. Imagine you are a Worship Group that has been asked to plan a service of dedication for the new Church Council. These people are charged with leadership in your congregation. What symbols would you give them as a sign of the leadership they are called to offer?

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Could this be done in your Church?

APPENDIX

1. Some in the church in Corinth attacked Paul because his leadership was not what they expected. They believed that if you belonged to God you would be rich, healthy, free from suffering, and they expected their leaders to embody that mistaken theology. In Corinthians we see Paul clearly setting out his understanding of servant leadership, and integrity even when suffering and under attack.

2. Philippians 2: 1-11 You may want to use this majestic hymn of praise to Jesus as the basis of your own prayers of adoration.