

## **SERMON: Sunday – 17 October 2021 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **To love is to serve**

**Hebrews 5:1-10**

**Mark 10:35-45**

The writer to the Hebrews declares that

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“Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him,  
‘You are my Son;’  
(Hebrews 5:5)

Even Jesus, our template, our model of what it looks like to be human, did not assume a certain status. He did not declare himself the next high priest. He did not claim to be great. He waited for God, the Father of all, to tell him who he was. He waited for the Great I Am to tell him who he was. His status as a Son, a child of God, was given to him as a gift from above.

And as a Son, even he needed to learn and grow into his vocation, learning obedience through suffering, all the time being made perfect, until he became “the Source of Eternal Salvation” - (the source means the author, the one responsible for, in other words he became the way through which people would find everlasting life).

According to Mark’s Gospel, the disciples James and John were yet to learn the lessons about greatness. They wanted Jesus to do their bidding. They wanted Jesus to do whatever they asked. They wanted the glory without the suffering. They wanted the rewards without the hard work. They wanted the recognition without putting in the hours behind the scenes. They wanted something that even Jesus couldn’t give them.

Because Jesus, albeit God in the flesh, is so humble, so full of humility, so identified with the least and the lowest, that he never claims to be God.

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“to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”  
(Mark 10:40)

Greatness, according to Jesus, is not something that is bestowed upon James and John, or any of the other disciples, because they somehow deserve it for hanging out with Jesus.

Greatness comes through service, and first place comes about to those who are willing to be the slave of all.

And before anyone could accuse Jesus of hypocrisy he would then go on to demonstrate what service would look like by giving his life for the sake of others.

I suppose it's another way of saying that following Jesus involves the taking up of one's cross. Because service in God's kingdom so often involves sacrificing one's own time, effort, energy, reputation, status etc, for the sake of someone else.

It's never easy and there are always excuses to shrink back from service. But when one does it there is usually a reward, a sense of satisfaction or that it was the right thing to do or a good thing to do.

It's never easy but it will never be as hard as the pain and suffering that Jesus went through on our behalf. But Jesus, who learned obedience through suffering, was being made perfect all the time by the Love that would not let him go and would carry him into glorious eternity.

To serve is to love and to love is to serve.

And Jesus shows everyone that the best way to serve and to lead is from behind and beneath, at the back or from below.

It may be that the world leads from above and looks down but it's not to be that way in the church. Service and leadership happen from lowest and last place not highest and first.

So much for the principles. What about the practise? How can we put these principles into action?

Well if to serve is to love and to love is to serve, we can easily see that every day has its opportunities to love and to serve. Wherever we are, whatever we're doing, we can treat it as loving service. Even our very act of living we can treat as loving service, and live as if we are living in the goodness of our loving Father in heaven.

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The apostle Paul in giving advice to slaves who had become followers of Christ, said that “whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (Colossians 3:23).

We who were once slaves have become followers of the Risen Christ and we too ought to do the same.

So where are the opportunities to serve at the moment?

Well you can help serve the teas after the service.

You can fill up a shoebox for the shoebox appeal.

You can help with EnerJ or the Guild

You can come along and support the days of prayer from COP26 or you can pray from your own home - for even to pray is to serve and to love.

You can volunteer to help us become an eco-congregation.

You can help us with data protection

Or with producing a church newsletter

Or by visiting the housebound

Or helping with safeguarding.

Or help look after our buildings, pull up weeds, tidy the church gardens.

There is a big list of opportunities at the moment within the church.

There is no shortage of things that are waiting to be done.

So get in touch if you feel inspired to serve in one of these ways or even in a way that I haven't mentioned.

Whatever we do, let's do it with all our heart. Let's do it for Love's sake and for the kingdom of God.

O Lord

You came not to be served but to serve.

You came to reveal love in all its fullness.

Raise us up in your love we pray.

Show us how to receive your love and service.

And where led to, show us how to serve in response to your great love.