

“EZ-Pass”- Mark 10:35-45, Romans 13:8-10

You know the feeling you get when you are waiting in a long line for something or to go somewhere, Busch Gardens, or checking our luggage in at the airport and go through security, and lo and behold someone is allowed to go in the front of the line bypassing all of the others who have been waiting in line with some reasonable patience.

In life everybody wants the easy way to the front of the line. We want the fast track to success skipping as many steps as possible. Everyone wants life to be like using the transponder that is on our windshields that lets us zip through toll-booths without having to get in line to pay the toll. Everyone wants to fly first class in order to avoid the long lines to board the plane and fight for carry on space in the overhead compartment. Kay and I have flown first class and business class both one time. I can remember feeling important as I passed by ahead of all of those economy class people knowing I had a big seat that I could make into a bed, with my own overhead bin and little better food. I was feeling pretty smug at the time as I looked out over the “peasants”. Most of us want to go first class or go at the head of the line because we don’t want to wait or we want to be at the front of the line so that people know we are important. This was all true of two of Jesus’ disciples in our story this morning.

James and John had been with Jesus for three years. Along with Peter they had become a part of the inner circle of Jesus. He relied on them more than the others. This went to James and John’s head. They decided that they wanted to be at the head of the line. A lust for greatness lurks behind the request of James and John. So they go to Jesus and in whispers so that the others do not overhear them that they wanted to be first in the Kingdom by sitting at the right and the left of Jesus. Jesus tells them “I don’t think you know what you are asking for. If you’re in front and first, are you willing to suffer right along with me? Are you willing to pay the price to have these exclusive rights? Beside that it is not mine to grant this. It comes from God.”

When the others heard about it they were miffed, peeved, and jealous. In doing this each exposes his lust for greatness as a two-sided coin. One side is

ambition and the other side is jealousy. Jesus has the right to be angry and disgusted with the two who asked for greatness and the others who reacted in jealousy. But instead Jesus recognizes their need to learn so he uses this moment as a teaching moment.

Jesus took the time to teach that heaven has different rules than earth. You have it all wrong if you think the first shall be first and the last be last. The world sees it that way, but among the disciples and us it needs to be different. The world teaches that in a monarchy no one walks before the king or queen and in a democracy no one gets up and leaves the building before the president does. There is rank and power in the world and there is rank and power in the Kingdom of God. But it is understood very differently.

In the Kingdom of God no leader receives privileges. No leader gets to go to the front of the line. No leader gets first class treatment. No leader gets to have the best seat. So what does a servant-leader look like in the Kingdom of God? A servant leader by rank is last of all. A servant leader is one who understands the importance of listening, being empathetic, and building community. They understand that it is not about them. Jesus establishes servanthood as the standard of greatness. In verse 45 he says, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Greatness is not to be sought. When it does come we accept it graciously.