

The other apostles are angry with James and John – not for *what* they asked, seats at the Lord's left and right in the kingdom, but *because* they asked. They thought of it first – and that's what really annoyed the others; but every one of them was *capable* of asking for seats at the Lord's left and right in the kingdom – because, at that time, that's what they thought it was all about. None of them ever really grasped – until it was almost too late – something that Jesus was constantly trying to drum into all their heads: that discipleship means service. The two brothers seemed to think it's all about sitting on high, in glory, ruling the twelve tribes of Israel, and so on. A matter of authority and power. But love and power cannot occupy the same space. We also have to remember that at this time, most of Jesus' disciples thought of him as a Messiah who would overthrow the tyranny of Rome and establish an earthly kingdom that would last forever. And in this they were to be bitterly disappointed.

Service is the act of doing something for someone else rather than for oneself. And doing something for someone else rather than for oneself is an instrument and operation of love. Service and love are inseparable. In fact, any service that is *not* done in love can have only a superficial meaning. The Lord Jesus is our exemplar in this because everything he ever said or did in his entire life was done not for himself, but for others. There's nothing sentimental or twee or sappy

about this: you try for one day to do everything for others – it's almost impossible; but then, as Jesus said, for people it is impossible, but not for God, because everything is possible for God.

Service is allowing our heart to give a little more than was asked for; we have to allow it to do this because our first instinct is to be mathematically and comfortably exact in our giving. Our giving should make us nervous. Service doesn't require us to be educated or clever or to have any personal status. Martin Luther King once said: "Everyone can be great because everyone can serve. You don't have to have a college education to serve. You don't even have to make your nouns and verbs agree. You only need a heart full of grace." This is what some writers – among many – have said about service:

Mother Teresa: "At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many great things we have done. We will be judged by "I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless, and you took me in."

The psychologist Carl Jung: "You are what you do, not what you say you'll do."

The Indian mystic and poet Rabindranath Tagore: "I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy."

Martin Luther King said: “The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But...the good Samaritan reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’”

And a contemporary mystic: “Before you call yourself a Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu or any other theology, learn to be human first. And to be human means to be of service to others.”

It’s worth repeating that this is not ‘do-goodism’; it is not sentimentalism – it is diamond-hard and sometimes it hurts; but service makes us say ‘we’... and every time we say ‘we’, ‘I’, ‘me’ and ‘mine’ has lost a battle. This is never easy for us – but it isn’t meant to be. What it *is* meant to be – and will always be – is an abiding joy.

Our daily work might not be of the most elevated or significant; the contribution I can make to the wellbeing of the world may be small; however, I can perform my service with dignity and I can offer it with unselfishness. My talents may not be great, but I can use them to bless the lives of others. The goodness of the world in which we live is the accumulated goodness of many small and seemingly inconsequential acts like mine. Finally, this has to be done as a spiritual practice. A conscious, aware, deliberate and thought-out daily practice. Because, as St Thomas Aquinas says, what we practice for long enough becomes a habit, and

a habit becomes a part of the person we are. God's grace builds on that and brings it to perfection in us.