

22 Pentecost, Celtic Service
Christ and Grace
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Mark 10:35-45
October 21, 2018

Parker Palmer is an educator and author, and a Quaker elder. In his book *Let Your Life Speak*, he tells of the time he was offered the presidency of a small educational institution. He wanted the job, and thought he should take it. Nevertheless, given his Quaker tradition, he assembled a "clearness committee" of a half-dozen trusted friends. Their job wasn't to give advice but to ask honest, open-ended questions, so that he could discern his vocational call for himself.

One of the friends asked Parker what he would like most about being president. He mentioned several things he wouldn't enjoy, like wearing a tie, at which his friend pointed out that he wasn't answering the question. Parker paused, thought a bit, then in a small voice he told them, "I guess what I'd like most is getting my picture in the paper with the word 'president' under it."

Parker was sitting with seasoned Quakers who knew that his answer was laughable, yet they did not laugh at all but went into a long and serious silence — a silence in which he could only sweat and inwardly groan. Finally, the questioner broke the silence with a question that cracked everyone up, "Parker, can you think of an easier way to get your picture in the paper?" It was then that he realized that his desire to be president had much more to do with his ego than with the vocation of his life. The clearness committee had made things clear, and he withdrew his name from the search.

Parker Palmer isn't alone; he's just more honest than most of us, and maybe more in touch with his true self. Indeed, the grab for glory goes all the way back to the Gospel we just heard. James and John, the Zebedee brothers, have been following Jesus since the beginning. Known as the sons of thunder, they were strong personalities, ready for their leader to take control of things, because they knew that when this happened, they would be sitting pretty. They would rocket to fame and fortune with Jesus the Messiah.

But Jesus sees that they still do not understand. Even though he's told them three times that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer and die on a cross and then be raised from the dead, they are not hearing him. They are too focused on their own glory to comprehend the glory of God standing there talking to them. In their lack of humility they cannot see the humility of Jesus.

Following Jesus is no easy thing. Other disciples will be jealous and angry with us. To become great we must be servants, to be first we must be slaves of all, and we must be willing to give our lives for others.

This world is filled with people who have power and fame and glory. It's easy to miss the glory of God when it's right in front of us. When we can set aside our glory to serve the people in line for lunch at the Hope Center downtown, we are serving Jesus. When we offer aid to those who call our churches asking for help, or to those struggling with addiction or living in abusive situations, we are holding the Christ light for them. When we are on our knees serving the children as we volunteer in the city schools, we will see the face of Jesus. When we visit the

elderly who wait in loneliness for someone to notice them, we will see the glory of God right in front of us.

Parker Palmer says, “Humility is the only lens through which great things can be seen--and once we have seen them, humility is the only posture possible.” May we have the grace to serve one another that we might see the true glory of God. Amen.