
Church of the Beatitudes United Church of Christ

Hello, My Name Is Nancy and
I Will Be Your Server Today

A Sermon by

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Scripture: Mark 10:35-45

“Hello, my name is Nancy, and I will be your server today.” You are more likely to leave me a larger tip if the weather is sunny, if I give you my name, squat next to your table, touch you lightly on the shoulder, and give you two after-dinner mints with your check. If I am a female wait person, drawing a smiley face on the check will increase my tip by 18 percent, but will decrease it by 9 percent if I am a male who draws a smiley face. There is little correlation between quality of service and the level of tipping. A person may have bad service and still leave a good tip. However that person is less likely to come back to that restaurant.¹

For 100 years now, by the time these words were heard, Rome had been the occupying power in Jesus’ homeland. One couldn’t travel, except he was taxed. One couldn’t sell his goods, except he was taxed. One couldn’t live on the land in Galilee, except he was taxed. Fully one-third to one-half of a poor man’s production was lost in taxes to the city, to the Herodians, to Rome. Farmers sold out and became tenants for men they seldom met and never loved—on land their ancestors had plowed before them. Or they moved their families into single rooms in the city, earning a living as day laborers during the harvest...or they turned to begging. Some became bandits and insurgents, roaming the countryside in gangs whom the peasants did not altogether blame. The poorest sold themselves into slavery, or they sold their children in order that neither should die.²

So James and John, the sons of thunder, the sons of God’s Word, the sons of a fisherman and fishermen themselves, ask Jesus, “Can we sit at your right hand, and your left hand, when the time comes for glory?”

What were they really asking? Were they really asking for the best seat at the table? Were they asking, ‘When is this suffering ever going to end?’ Were they asking, ‘When is that glory you talk about going to be?’

As fisherman, they knew the hardships too. “Where do you get the capital to buy the linen to make your sails? And whence the capital to buy the flax that makes your nets, the lumber from the woodsmen, anchors and weights from stonemasons? Why, from the broker who bought the right to lease you fishing rights from the chief tax collectors of the industry, who bought their right to sell the leases from the machinery of the court of Herod Antipas, who himself owes tribute to the emperor in Rome. Crushed almost to death. How much of the fish you catch is left to you? How much is owed to the broker? How much is consumed by taxes? Then to transport the fish, to salt the fish, to pack and pickle, and ship again.³

¹ http://www.marginalrevolution.com/marginalrevolution/2005/04/what_do_we_know.html

² Jesus: A Novel, Walter Wangerin Jr., Zondervan, 2005, p. 79.

³ *Ibid.*, p.134.

James and John, fishermen who followed Jesus, experienced a freedom they had never known in their working days, a freedom they could never have imagined. Perhaps they were scared their freedom was all coming to end. The worst had happened. Jesus had died. He wasn't coming again as he had said. They were left to themselves once again. Them against the Romans. It was never going to get any better. Not in their lifetime. They needed a word of hope. That life was more than this: death and taxes, taxes and death.

Jesus says to them, "You are looking for greatness? Here? Now? Then serve others." Take everything you have and serve others. Whether you have a lot. Whether you have little. Serve others. Then you will be great.

Hello, my name is Nancy, and I will be your server today.

Are our lives so different? Are our questions so different from the questions of James and John? When will we see your glory, O God? How do I use my life, my gifts, in service, in servanthood?

Here is one way. ten apples. These ten apples represent one piece of my life, my financial life perhaps. They represent, if you will, my money, the money I have to spend, what I spend it on, what I decide are my choices. How much I will keep. How much I will give away. With whom I will share. With whom I will keep from sharing. I have been around church for a long time and so I know of the word 'tithes', one tenth, first fruits go to God. Way back in the Old Testament laws. Continued by Jesus. The thing that Jesus talked most about: money, resources, sharing. This red apple is the money I want to give to the church. One apple out of ten. The rest: my house, my mortgage, my rent, my utilities, my food, my car, my clothes, my children, their college, my health insurance, my doctor's bills, my gas, my retirement. Then the dryer stops working. Then I would really like to go on vacation. Cruises are really a bargain these days. Large screen TV? Christmas is coming soon. New phone, computer game, mama needs new shoes this fall.

Jesus said, "You see what the Romans are doing to you, how they lord power over you, how they do not care for one another. But you, my friends, my followers, you know of a better way. Whoever would be great among you must be one who serves and gives. And whoever would be first must be slave, giver to all. I came to serve and to give my life. And look at me now. I am the resurrection and the life. Follow me and you will have that life too." Amen.