

## Looking Out for Number One

Sermon 2018-09-23 - Year B - Pentecost 9-18 - The Rev. Christopher M. Klukas  
Wisdom of Solomon 1:16–2:1, 2:12–22; Psalm 54; James 3:16–4:6; Mark 9:30–37

- Fisherman's tale
  - "In 2007, President George W. Bush took Russian President Vladimir Putin fishing...Putin caught a bass and was photographed in Bush's boat, holding a fish that to "experienced fishing eyes" appeared to be about 20 inches long."
  - "By the time the leaders had reached the dock, however, Putin's fish miraculously had grown to 31 inches -- or, at least it must have, since that's how big Bush told reporters the fish was. The controversy drew international media attention..."
  - "Some speculated that Bush's fib was an effort to improve then tense U.S.-Russian relations, but David DiBenedetto, editor of the fishing journal SaltWater Sportsman, sought to put the Presidential prevarication in an everyman context: "We've all had a non-fisherman on the boat and added a few inches or pounds to his or her catch," he explained."<sup>1</sup>
- Some have found it hard to believe that grown men would walk down the road arguing about who is the greatest, as we read in Mark. I don't find it hard to believe at all, many of them were fishermen, afterall!
- v. 33, Jesus asks what they were arguing about. Jesus likely already knew the answer, like a parent who asks their child what they were just doing. We know that he knew because he gave them teaching on being servants even though they did not answer him.
- v. 34 The disciples kept quiet. They knew that their argument about who was the greatest was wrong, and they were embarrassed to confess this to Jesus.
- v. 35 Jesus' response to the argument over who was the greatest is counter-intuitive. The kingdom of God is upside down from the way of the world.

### The Way of the World

- It would make logical sense that if you want to be first, you should work hard to put yourself in that place, whatever it takes. It doesn't seem to make any sense at all to put yourself in the last place! This is exactly the advice that world gives us.
- The way of the world is that if you want to make it to the top you have to fight for it and squash down the competition.
  - "Looking out for number one"
  - James 3:14-16 - The way of the world involves jealousy and selfish ambition and it brings about "disorder and every vile practice."
    - Fighting your way to the top might work sometimes. But consider the consequences to doing this. Broken relationships, hurt, frustration, and a constant fear that someone is coming behind you to steal your place!
  - This is not to say that you should be a doormat and let people walk all over you.
  - Self-care is certainly important.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.animalplanet.com/wild-animals/5-putins-big-bass/>

## The Way of the Kingdom

- The way of the kingdom is that by serving others we become great.
  - James 3:17-18 - wisdom from above is the opposite of the wisdom of the world.
  - We might worry about our ability to get ahead if we "play nice" or "play fair" while others cheat. We need not worry, however, because we know that God is watching over us and that it pleases him when we walk in his ways.
  - James 3:6 quotes from Proverbs 3:34 saying "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."
- Daniel is a great example of this way of the kingdom. He was among the exiles taken to Babylon and was selected to be taken into the King's household to learn the language and culture of the Chaldeans so he could serve in the King's court.
  - He was a man of integrity (he would not eat the king's food)
  - He was a man of prayer (and went to the Lion's den for it)
  - He remained a close advisor to the king through four different kings (Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, Cyrus) and two different empires (Babylon and Persia)
- We need to be careful to keep from falling into the ways of the world. This must begin in the Church and then continue into our lives in the world as well.
  - ACNA has sought to get away from campaigning for the offices of Bishop and Archbishop. Conclave to choose Abp. Foley Beach.
  - "Rather than engaging in a political process in which groups rally not only to win but also to defeat others, our bishops reported that they were committed to discerning the person whom God was calling and anointing to lead as the next Archbishop. They also said that they were committed to doing so in a way that unites the church. In order to do that, bishops shared their hearts and priorities. To engage differences in a way that preserves relationships took open communication and time—in fact, almost three full days."<sup>2</sup>
- We can do this in the world, like Daniel did, by refusing to lie, cheat, steal, and manipulate to get ahead. Instead we must entrust our future to the Lord, through prayer, and working hard with integrity (Ephesians 6:5-8).

## Following Jesus

- Our ultimate example is Jesus, his incarnation and his passion. This is, perhaps, one of the reasons why this teaching follows immediately after Jesus foretells his coming death.
  - Jesus didn't have to leave the glory of heaven. Jesus didn't have to die on the cross. But he wanted to be reconciled to us and so he was willing to leave his glory and suffer rejection, pain, and death for our sake. Jesus became a servant.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.virtueonline.org/acna-conclave-council-and-assembly>