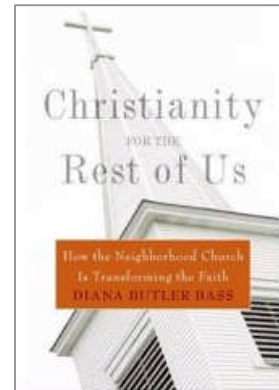


Sermon October 22, 2006
Father Fred Heard
Mark:10:35-45

So many people are concerned about the future of the church and the road that will lead them to heaven. Many people lay awake at night worrying about these two points. And now there is something else to think about: a new book has just been published which discusses the sudden growth of the mainline church: *Christianity For the Rest of Us* by Diana Butler Bass. She suggests that mainline church tradition is more like the clay from which you make a statue. We can rework it and play with it. She compares the clay to scripture and suggests that each successive generation is called on to take that same body of scripture and make it look beautiful in and for our own time. A church and its doctrine and a Christian can be reflective of the past or it can be relevant to our time and Ms. Bass suggests that mainline churches are beginning to recognize that fact. It was in seminary that I decided to take a class called Biblical



Archaeology and it was in that class that I learned that biblical history is changing and it is changing because we are learning how to read history more accurately and we also are recognizing that the entire picture is still really an incomplete puzzle and new artifacts are being discovered almost daily.

But certain truths never change. Too many people spend all of their allotted time on this earth trying to become rich and famous or rich and powerful or maybe just rich or maybe just influential. Reality says that only a few people get to any of these slots. The lot for all the rest might be to envy them. But Jesus tells us not to envy because God will judge by different rules. One's possessions or position do not count. What matters is what we give of ourselves. God encourages people to give the most of themselves. God's plan does not honor the people who wield power, but people who love their neighbors and help those in need. It is how we use that power. God won't reward the people with great talent only, but He will remember the people with great hearts. It is how we use that talent. Is Bishop Tutu remembered for his power (which he does possess) or his heart? Is the Sister or Brother who calls in time of need and pain remembered within our parish because of their role in society or because of their heart?

Our new Bishop, Marc, only yesterday at our convention called on Episcopalians to become green and truly be good stewards for the planet earth. He called on us to end the war in Iraq. He called on us to end discrimination and truly open our arms to all God's children.



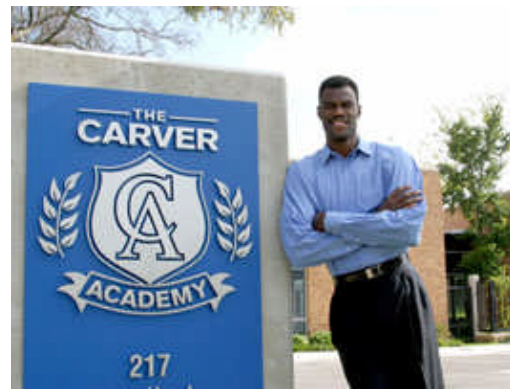
What made George Washington great? Was it the fact that he was our first President? If that is the case, remember that had George Washington not been President, there would have been someone else—another first President. But would that person have contributed the precedents that President Washington left behind like declining to

serve a third term? Would another 16th President have freed the slaves and offered his hand to the South as did Abraham Lincoln following the Civil War?

An athlete is chosen by the owners to bring points to the team. Does this make that athlete great? David Robinson is honored as a basketball player for the San Antonio Spurs. He was the NBA Rookie of the Year in 1990 —Defensive Player of the Year in 1992 —Most Valuable Player of the Year in 1995. When he is eligible, Robinson is probably headed for the Basketball Hall of Fame. In almost any conversation about sports, David Robinson is considered great...but that is an earthly measuring stick. In 1991 he visited the Gates Elementary School in San Antonio and challenged the kids to go to college, promising each one who did a \$2000 scholarship. Many of them took him up on his offer — and he ended up giving each \$8000 instead of \$2000.



He and his wife then started the Carver Academy in San Antonio. They donated \$9 million to get the school started. This is believed to be the largest charitable contribution ever made by a professional athlete. Carver Academy is dedicated to academic excellence—but because Robinson is a Christian he wants the kids to understand that spiritual values are as important as academics or athletics. David Robinson is a great human being. As our Articles of Religion put it, these good deeds are the fruits of David Robinson’s faith. His belief has motivated him to do good works—not the quest for power.



Today’s Gospel discusses greatness and how God defines greatness and you know what, it has nothing to do with points on a scoreboard. It is all about how we live our lives. Perhaps we think we have never lived near human greatness—but maybe we just haven’t thought of it in this light.

James and John ask Jesus for permission to sit with him at the head table when he comes into his kingdom...one at Jesus right hand and the other at his left hand. In most meetings, the boss sits at the end or like the President in a Cabinet meeting—he sits in the middle with the Secretary of State on one side and the Secretary of Defense on the other and the remaining cabinet officers sit in the order their positions were created. In any event, the most trusted or senior members of the team are closest to the head person and this allows them to prompt the boss discreetly as needed. People of lesser rank perhaps do not sit at the table but are placed around the outside wall. The boss is front and center in any arrangement and the trick for everyone else is to get as close as possible.

James and John thought that Jesus would become king once they reached Jerusalem...and they wanted the two most honored seats. Jesus, you will recall had already chosen three disciples as favorites and the three included James and John. Peter was the third. Since James and John were brothers, it was easy for them to bond. In this case Peter was the outsider and he was being pushed to the side. "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Translated, he was asking James and John if they were able to share his fate. Imagining Jesus at the head of the table, they assured him they were able. Jesus then told them that they would share his fate, but he couldn't promise them the seats at his right and left.

Do you remember all that talk at the beginning of the sermon about power and wealth and influence? Jesus was lifted up and it was on a cross and there was a thief at his right hand and a thief at his left hand.

That was one of God's ways of warning us to expect some surprises in his kingdom. In God's kingdom, the old rules — the world's rules — won't apply. We will have to learn a whole new set of rules.

God gives all of us a glimpse into His kingdom. Jesus explains the new rules. He begins by talking about the rulers with whom James and John are familiar. Those rulers lord it over people. The ones whom people usually count as great are really only tyrants — oppressors — people who exercise power cruelly and unjustly. Jesus tells James and John — and us — that the kingdom of God isn't like that.

So who will be the great people in God's kingdom? "Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all." Episcopalians are smart—but we can't be just head-smart. We must be Christians—but we must take seriously what Jesus says here. We can have a lot of money and we can be famous but that cannot be our first priority...we must devote our lives to the betterment of others. When we get to heaven those who will be sitting with Jesus will be the people who have devoted themselves to service—to giving—to others.

I know you pretty well and there are people in this congregation who I expect to be sitting pretty high up at Jesus' table. People here on earth might not consider them as great and most importantly, they don't think of themselves as great. Not many people know their names, but God knows their names. These people show all of us the way. They give themselves in quiet service to our church or our children. They are here at church whenever there is a need at here or in the community. There will be a look of surprise on their face when Jesus says, "Come and sit with me."

"Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all." AMEN