

Disciples aren't greater than

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Our proclivity for greatness is rather embarrassing, isn't it? No wonder the disciples keep their mouths shut when Jesus inquires about the topic of their conversation on the road. We want it, and we want it big time—recognition, sway, importance—but we also get that we shouldn't admit this out loud.

We are good at maintaining this kind of self-censorship, especially when it comes to saving our selves from any kind of embarrassment or judgment. We recognize that we shouldn't let on to our penchant for self-aggrandizement. We work hard to appear as though our best intentions are focused on other people. As a result, in the place of honesty arises a false humility that ends up being worse than wanting to be great in the first place. If you want to be the greatest, at least be honest about it.

Case in point is the current political climate, as candidates compete for our attention and admiration. How clear it seems that the desire for power is couched behind promises and propositions that ring of untruthfulness. As if telling people and parties what they want to hear can somehow mask the truth of who you are and what you want. It all kind of smells.

And Jesus can sniff out insincerity in a microsecond. That's one of the subtle truths of this passage, one easily overlooked. It's more tolerable to endure the momentary discomfort in being called out by Jesus than to realize that all too frequently, even daily, there is ample justification for being called out. Jesus names the disciples' secrecy, their attempts to hide their deepest desires—desires that have nothing to

do with the expansion of the kingdom of God and everything to do with the advancement of the self.

The deception that Jesus must expose is that when it comes to discipleship, there is no room for comparison. Potentially lost in translation is that the disciples are arguing about who is *greater*, not greatest. And greater means that someone is lesser. That's the root problem that Jesus exposes—when we want to be greater, accompanying this wish is the corollary that another will be deemed less than. Such diminutions are not acceptable when it comes to the life Jesus imagines for his followers and the world God wants for those God loves.

Jesus wants something more for us, something more than endless comparison, judgment, and expectation. Something more than the constant, desperate urge to define ourselves over and against the other. Jesus wants followers who get that God is here.

When God is here, our machinations for greatness seem rather silly. God has already claimed us great—great in our following, great in our belief, great in our witness. Because God already became the least, leaving the heavens of divinity to be known in the wilderness of humanity. To be great has been upended, called out, re-imagined by God's very self. And that is something to talk about.