

One day I was at KMart and I noticed a young mother trying to contain her little boy who was riding in the shopping trolley. Again and again I heard the words, "I want that, Mommy!" Each time the boy's mother replied, "No, you can't have that." You could tell that she was growing impatient as her young son constantly tested her. He wanted just about everything he could see.

The more things they passed the louder he became. Finally, a few seconds before a major temper tantrum, the mother said, "That's it, we're going home. Next time your father can take you shopping."

I am sure that many of you have witnessed this same scenario. Little children want things. They don't understand that they cost money. The shelves are so full they don't see the problem with having what they see. Saying, "No" is not always an easy thing to do when it comes to our children. They live in a society that has a multitude of options. When they see their friends getting things, they want them too.

It's not just children who want things. Grownups want things too. Why do we see so many car commercials, gambling and betting ads promising a better life if we have these things. It will only double in advertising as Christmas approaches.

The disciples wanted special treatment. They wanted Jesus to guarantee that they would have a seat next to him in heaven. Jesus doesn't say "no" but neither does he promise them they'll get what they want. Instead, he invites them to say "yes" to the road that will get them there.

The journey includes "the cup and baptism." In other words, the road won't be easy. It's not a matter of picking things off a shop shelf. It is a road which involves dedication, commitment and sacrifice. If the disciples want to be close to Jesus they will have to assume the role of a servant.

Doesn't sound like fun, does it? Who wants to be a servant? Who wants to be "slave to all?"

I believe we have a real problem with the term, “slave or servant.” Historically we think of the servant as one who is totally powerless. We also think that one who is a servant has no intelligence or creative resources.

And, since those who are servants are powerless and poor, how can they possibly have any faith and be included in the kingdom of God? By reminding his disciples that “I came not to be served but to serve,” Jesus provides a totally different understanding of what it means to be a person of faith.

To help bring that home, he dethrones himself. He refuses to be put on a pedestal. It is not about seeking prestige and honour, nor is it about special privileges. On the contrary, it is about serving others without being focused on rewards and benefits.

That being said, to be a servant does not mean one is powerless. In fact Jesus taught his disciples to give power away. When a person is able to give power away that is really powerful.

When I was considering ordained ministry my pastor wanted me to have the opportunity to preach. He took himself out of his own pulpit and invited me to preach before I started the road to ordination.

He was popular with his people and he was an outstanding preacher. But to help launch my ministerial career he yielded his authority to a man who had never delivered a sermon. As I look back on that time I can now appreciate the power he was giving away. He empowered me to begin a career in ministry.

Giving away power is not something we are accustomed to. We like to be in control. We are conditioned to be successful. We want others to do what we tell them. We even want God to do for us what we ask.

This is exactly what the disciples were doing when they asked Jesus to give them special seats in heaven. They wanted him to arrange it so they could get what they wanted.

But, what was Jesus’ response? “Sorry guys, I don’t have that kind of power.” Even Jesus couldn’t pressure God for favours.

A servant may work for someone else, but that doesn't mean that he/she lacks creativity or doesn't have thoughts, feelings or a sense of humor.

Remember Alice Nelson, played by Ann Davis, on the Brady Bunch? She cooked, cleaned, but most of all she was close to all the children and they frequently sought her out for advice. It was her presence in the television show that helped to make it a success.

The disciples wanted greatness but Jesus invited them to pursue a road that led to serving others instead of serving themselves. It was the "servant" who would aspire to greatness, not those who wanted positions of power and prestige.

The servant is one who empowers others. The servant is one who works behind the scenes rather than be in the limelight. A servant's greatest resource is not their ability to produce but their desire to love others.

Mother Teresa was attending a party full of dignitaries. The guest list included presidents and statesmen from around the world. They came in their crowns and jewels and silks. Mother Teresa wore her ever-present sari, held together by a safety pin.

True leadership must be for the benefit of the followers not the enrichment of the leaders.

She was also engaged in conversation with a nobleman who was intrigued by her work to the poorest of the poor in Calcutta. From his vantage point, her work seemed endless and frustrating. He asked her if she didn't become discouraged by seeing so few successes.

"No, I do not become discouraged," Mother Teresa answered. "You see, God has not called me to a ministry of success. He has called me to a ministry of mercy." "I came not to be served, but to serve," Jesus said. "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant."