

# ***Servant or Bully***

***Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)***

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One of the difficulties that we have as Christians relates to the contrast between the ways of the world and the way of Christ. Think of the Olympics and its sense of Win... Win... Win... and what a contrast this is to the call of Jesus to Serve... Serve... Serve... And this is the reason that Drugs are in sport - If winning is everything, then the only crime is to get caught.

But this not new. The two disciples discussed - who was the greatest? - Who would receive the honour? Winners are gridders. And the ten were angry - because they were frightened that they would miss out because James and John got in first. And in their world as in ours, to lose was to fail.

So Jesus had a lot to teach both them and us. Perhaps I should say from the outset, that there is a general challenge in this rather than a specific one for us as individuals. The spirit of generosity in this district flows in and around the desire to be serving each other. But even we, here in this district, have a challenge to elevate this service of others to the elite level. There is still room for improvement before we can expect the Gold Medal for service. Moreover, it is a challenge, as we are called to differ markedly from the rest of the society.

I remember in Cressy, that on one community committee that I serve, the chairman resigned. He did so, after one of the members decided to take him to task over some perceived wrong to her. The battle escalated to a shouting match, and the next day, we had a resignation with the comment that he did not have to take this at his time of life. And I agree - he doesn't. No one should have to put up with verbally abusive people.

Significantly, I served on this committee as a way of engaging my community. It is an opportunity for me to meet and mix with non-Christians - people outside the church. This is something that clergy do not always get to do. The problem being is that this V.A.P. is a vocally professed Christian. (By that I mean that she makes a point of telling everyone that she is a Christian). Significantly, my bridge building into the community has been impeded by the actions of this one individual. Indeed, much of our bad press as a church comes from a few such individuals.

Of currency at the moment is the prevalence of bullying. Bullying is perhaps the antithesis of serving. The impact goes far beyond the schoolyard into the workplace and dare I say even to the church. I have seen preachers bully congregations, rectors bully parishioners, church wardens bully rectors and I won't even talk about the experience of being a theological student or a curate. We have tended to focus on the incidents of sexual abuse in the church, and these need to be dealt with, but there is equally a problem within the church of verbal or emotional abuse. Above all else, this dishonours Christ and diffuses the effectiveness of our witness to the world.

Of course, if I was to ask the question directly, "Are you a bully?" most people would answer no. We tend to selectively evaluate our own character traits particularly when we compare them to others. (I am forthright - you are stubborn, I am decisive - you are a dictator etc.)

But bullying is concerned with getting our own way and how we get it. It may only be concerned with having our opinions vindicated. We all can name people with whom we wisely choose to keep silent with rather than pay the penalty of expressing a contrary opinion. A simple test would be to look at our reactions to contrary opinions and how we treat others when we don't get our own way. Much destructive behaviour in the church comes from the self-righteous behaviour of a few. And note I am not talking about right and wrong here. For Jesus was wrongly arrested, tried, convicted and crucified but he would turn the other cheek rather than take up the options he had to win. Have we lost the art of turning the other cheek, of walking the extra mile, of giving our shirt as well as our tunic? Have we lost the plot?

The Good Samaritan was not concerned if the man set upon by thieves deserved all he got. He saw a need and responded. Much of my engagement with others is to hear of their hardships that have come about because others have responded to them or their decisions, with the response of a bully. It is not a case of whether they are right or wrong but dealing with the wounds from others. Perhaps we should all ask ourselves a few questions. Am I truly always right? How do I respond to another with a different opinion? - When they have power over me? Or when I have power over them? Do I respect divine authority given to others? Do my words and actions and encounters with others bring peace or distress?

The question What would Jesus do? is not just a catch phrase - it is a way of life. If others can not see Jesus in us, where will they find him?

**THE SON OF MAN CAME NOT TO BE SERVED, BUT TO SERVE AND GIVE HIS LIFE A RANSOM FOR MANY.**

**AMEN**