



[Pastor Keith GeRue](#)

**Sermon for the Feast of St. Timothy**  
January 24, 2021

## Sent to Serve! Don't You Get It?

### Matthew 20:20-28

*<sup>20</sup> Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. <sup>21</sup> And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." <sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." <sup>23</sup> He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." <sup>24</sup> And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. <sup>25</sup> But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, <sup>28</sup> even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

The elementary classroom teacher gives a thorough explanation of the significance and location of the subject and verb in the sentence. Immediately after the explanation, a student gives a blank look to the teacher. **"Don't you get it?"** The same scenario happens in the middle school math class as students struggle with algebraic equations. **"Don't you get it?"**

The question also comes up in the home when the clearly defined family rules or expectations have again been violated. **"Don't you get it?"** In addition, the question has been asked personally and painfully when a heartache or struggle is not understood by a spouse, friend or fellow parishioner. **"Don't you get it?"**

The question could well summarize the response that Jesus might have had at the interaction with His disciples and the mother of the sons of Zebedee in our Gospel. Jesus has repeatedly taught His disciples about His mission. Matthew's Gospel notes three specific conversations. Following the **"who do people say that the Son of Man is?"** question (Matt. 16:13) and Peter's confession, **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"** (v. 16), we are told, **"From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things ... and be killed, and on the third day be raised"** (v. 21). Shortly after Jesus' Transfiguration (Matt. 17), Jesus again shares a similar message (vv. 22–23).



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In the days before the Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem, Jesus continues to teach His disciples. Jesus is very clear as to why they will be journeying to Jerusalem: **“And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death”** (Matt. 20:18). Jesus continues with details about the emotional and physical agony of His journey.

Hopefully, the disciples would begin to understand the purpose and gravity of Jesus’ mission. However, rather than asking additional questions or offering support, the disciples are immediately distracted by an interaction with the mother of the sons of Zebedee. She asks, **“Tell me if these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom”** (v. 21). We are blessed with the broader perspective of Jesus’ mission and the events that were to follow. We might respond, **“Don’t you get it?”**

The disciples get caught up in the conversation, **“and when the ten heard it, they were angry at the two brothers.”** In their jealousy, they wanted similar positions in Jesus’ kingdom. They were more concerned about themselves than their Lord and Master.

Before we become too judgmental of the mother and disciples, we must reflect and confess that often we, too, don’t get it.

We don’t get the reality of our sin. We identify with the disciples as we seek our own prideful place in the kingdom. Surely, we are more worthy of recognition than others. Certainly, our service in church, school, home and other contexts deserves some reward. Prior to this text, Jesus told of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1–16) who felt they deserved greater reward because of their longer and more faithful service in the kingdom. Rather than celebrating Jesus’ grace, we seek our own glory. God’s Law would have us know that we are sinful in thought, word and deed, and deserve no place in His kingdom.

The Good News is that **“the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”** (v. 28). The Son of Man was willing to leave the right hand of His Father’s kingdom to take on human flesh as the babe in Bethlehem. Jesus journeys to the cross, fulfilling every detail of God’s plan of salvation. He was willing to be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and to be condemned to death and delivered to be mocked, flogged and crucified (vv. 18–19). Jesus served as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. So that His service might be the sufficient and final payment received by all who believe, He was raised on the third day (v. 19).

The message of Christ’s death and resurrection is the message that Lutheran schools have shared with children and families for generations. Like the disciples, we get distracted from Jesus’ message individually and collectively. Lutheran schools seek to offer an excellent education, a safe and thriving environment, a variety of activities, and other aspects of education in today’s complex and demanding world. However, Lutheran schools are unique and critical because of the message that



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Jesus came **“to give his life as a ransom for many.”** That’s the message that Lutheran school students are baptized into. That’s the message taught and lived every day in the classroom. The world may not **“get”** our message, but our mission is to share the work of our servant Savior. Lutheran school students will not **“get”** every language arts, mathematics or science lesson taught. They may not even get every explanation in Luther’s Small Catechism. However, we pray that through the Spirit’s work and blessing, they believe Jesus served them through His suffering, death, and resurrection.

Having heard of Jesus’ saving service, the disciples are **“Sent to Serve.” “For whoever would be great among you must be your servant”** (v. 26). Jesus demonstrated greatness by associating with little children, healing lepers, responding to the pleas of fathers and mothers for their sick and dying children, sitting in the living rooms of thieving tax collectors and other sinners, and washing feet. The King of kings came to serve all the way to the cross.

We, who have received the gift of God’s love through the Means of Grace, are sent to serve. The message of our sinful nature, the temptation of Satan and the encouragement of the world is **“serve me.”** Again, we identify with Jesus’ disciples and say, **“Put me next to You on Your throne.”** Parents desire, **“Serve my child first.”** Everyone seems to suggest, **“What about me and my rights?”** Certainly fairness and justness are godly and necessary. However, many of our requests tend to be self-serving.

Jesus teaches, **“It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant.”**

We praise God for the many servants who are part of our Lutheran school ministry. We are blessed with great teachers, great staff, great volunteers and the great support of many. The greatness is not measured in academic degrees, hours of service, dollars donated or other typical standards. The greatness is measured in a faithful response to God’s grace and a generous response to His blessings.

We are sent to serve children and families. This year we have a super registration of 61 students and an outstanding staff. We see new students and family members Baptized each year. Our teachers have taught on an average of 16 years. We truly have many who have servant hearts and have been sent to serve the Lord with gladness.

We are sent to serve our community in Jesus’ name. Our students and staff truly have servant hearts which reaches many in our community. We sing for the community, rake leaves, cleanup garbage throughout the neighborhood, thank police and rescue workers and military, and the servitude goes on and on.



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We are sent to serve the world. Our chapel offering support missionaries like Amanda Groshek of our own congregation.

We confess that we don't always "**get it.**" We miss the point of Jesus' message and mission. We still seek our own interests. Through the message of God's Word in our worship and in the classrooms of our Lutheran school, we continue to "get" the Good News of God's grace and we "get" that we are sent to serve in Jesus' name. Amen.