

Service: Last Not First

Intro. I don't watch Downton Abbey, but someone who does explained it to me. It seems to be about the lives of the "upstairs" people and the "downstairs" people. The downstairs folks are servants who work for the upstairs folks. We are not very familiar with that kind of servant, but we *are* "served" by a lot of people. Waiters at restaurants; grocery cashiers; people who pick up our garbage and harvest our food. At times we don't really see them and what they do for us. We have to admit that without them our lives would be more difficult. [M. McGlone, NCR, 9/7-20.] In the gospel the Lord teaches about servants and good leadership.

I. After telling the disciples a second time that he would suffer, die and rise, they had no comment. They must have looked at him like he was crazy.

After they had some time to think about it, the Lord asked what they were *arguing* about on the way. Different from last week's question, the disciples were not quick to answer. They were *embarrassed* at their behavior and had the good sense to keep quiet. They were like children who were caught bickering with each other. The disciples didn't like bad news any more than we do. They understood *exactly* what the Lord was telling them. They didn't want to let go of the fantasy of the Messiah as a warrior king and standing next to him on the "red carpet," in the spotlight.

We should not shake our heads at the supposed stupidity of the disciples. They didn't know the whole story yet. *We* know the whole story and we *still* screw up God's plan regularly. Rather, look at the disciples as people like ourselves with many of

the same fears and weaknesses we have. Yet they found a way to triumph over them and follow the Lord. The disciples eventually understood that they were serving someone and something bigger than themselves.

Concl. Fear can hold us back from facing difficult things in life and lead us to focus instead on meaningless things. The phrase, “rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic” means rather than coming up with a solution to a problem or obstacle, we waste our time and energy in denial by focusing on trivial matters. Rather than discuss or even ask what suffering, death, or resurrection meant the disciples talked about who was more important, who the Lord liked best. Leaders should be thinking less about themselves and *their* needs and more about the people they are called to serve. Our world sometimes

focuses too much on collecting things, power or authority. We often get caught up in the same thing and lose touch with reality and the value of people over stuff. The Lord reminded the disciples that greatness as well as true leadership is in serving, even the little ones who have no power. The disciple who serves others represents, not himself, but the one who sent her or him – the Lord. That servant shows what true greatness is. The ministry fair is not just a chance to brag about the good work we do. It is an opportunity and an invitation to be servants in our community.

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