

A New Way

God both comforts us and invites us out of our comfort zones. To be close to God is to recognize that God calls us to serve others, to extend ourselves beyond our own desires. To be close to God is to recognize the majesty and wonder of God's creation, to be humbled by God's glory.

Focus scripture: Mark 10:35–45

Though not included in the focus scripture, Mark 10:32 sets the stage for what unfolds with two key pieces of information: the disciples and Jesus are on their way to Jerusalem, and those who followed were "afraid." Are they afraid because they do not understand what Jesus is telling them about what will happen to him in Jerusalem, or because they are beginning to absorb what he has been saying about his suffering and death?

The disciples desire to remain close to Jesus – why else would they follow down such a road? However, in the same way they misunderstand what awaits Jesus in Jerusalem, misunderstanding now colours their desire to remain close to Jesus. What they seek in terms of closeness is not to imitate Jesus' servanthood, but to gain a privileged position.

As he did with opponents, Jesus responds to this question of the disciples with a question of his own about what exactly they seek. The places James and John identify have to do not only with proximity, but also with authority. Note how Jesus answers them. He could have said at the outset that such places were not his to grant, as he will in verse 40; but that would have allowed no room to explore their commitment. A question and a confident answer about a cup and baptism are raised. The cup carries meanings of joy and suffering in the Hebrew scriptures. Baptism, as Paul will later identify, involves sharing death as well as sharing life. The two disciples, eager for places of honour, offer a quick affirmation as to their ability to drink Christ's cup and to share Christ's baptism.

The second scene brings an aggrieved ten into Jesus' presence. They are angry with James and John – though the text is silent whether they are angry because of the request James and John made, or because they did not speak up first themselves. Jesus' answer to them suggests the latter may be true. Jesus'

words to the ten clarify that the community to be fashioned among those who follow him is to be of a different order than what one encounters elsewhere. The distinction lies precisely in the issue of privilege and greatness. Among disciples, greatness comes in servanthood. Our "place" in community finds expression not in what rank we can pull over others, or in what authority we can exercise over others, but in what service we can render in their midst. Closeness to Jesus comes from imitating the way he lived his life for others.

The footnote to this narrative is that James and John became the servant leaders of the Jerusalem church. Tradition holds that they *did* drink the cup of martyrdom.

Job, too, has been asking for something that he finally receives – but not at all in the way he had imagined. In **Job 38:1–7 (34–41)** God responds at last to Job. Yet God's statements, instead of starting with an acknowledgement of all Job has experienced, simply proclaim that God is God, and Job is not. Neither right or wrong, it simply is.

"O God my God, you are very great," proclaims the writer of **Psalm 104:1–9, 24, 35c**. One can imagine Job eventually singing this psalm, which recounts the majesty and wondrous deeds of God in creation.

The author of **Hebrews 5:1–10** reminds us that Christ did not seek greater glory but simply sought to follow God. Humbly and righteously. Christ's humility in this service forms another invitation to find our place and calling in servanthood.

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Where do you struggle with seeking privilege of position above the possibility of serving? How can you open up more to awe and wonder? What transformations might Jesus' words about greatness and service work in your congregation?



Focus scripture

Mark 10:35–45

Additional scriptures

Job 38:1–7, (34–41)

Psalm 104:1–9, 24, 35c

Hebrews 5:1–10



Seasons of the Spirit

is based on semi-continuous readings of the Revised Common Lectionary.

God of mystery and majesty, you call all life into being. Call us to the places where we may best serve you. Call us to the service where we may follow you most closely. Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit www.seasonsonline.ca to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.



The Focus for Adults

Adults bring different views and experiences of what makes a person great. For some, it may be public accomplishment. For others, it may be associated with the “perks” of fame or celebrity. Problems or misunderstandings arise when secular models of greatness blur what we may seek from leaders – or for ourselves – in Christian community.

This week’s readings challenge a widespread understanding of merit; the idea that we deserve certain privileges and perks based on how hard we have worked or how much we have sacrificed, even at the expense of others. Jesus shares an alternative way to greatness, which is not based on what we do for ourselves, but rather on how we serve. In

contrast to exercises of privilege or power, Jesus defines greatness as service. The goal, for Jesus, is not what we will get out of the task, but who will be touched by it. Adults may relate this to the “greatness” they have witnessed in those who serve individuals who are vulnerable and in need.

Greatness in service democratizes community, for greatness is not limited to the few or the privileged. It belongs to all who serve human need in any way. As you prepare, bring to mind the group members, recognizing each one as a child of God, gifted for service. Pray that all might grow in recognizing and celebrating the call to greatness in serving as a follower of Jesus the Christ.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week’s scriptures, Job 38:1–7, (34–41); Psalm 104:1–9, 24, 35c; Mark 10:35–45; Hebrews 5:1–10, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 45).
- ❑ To access connections between current events and the focus passage, visit www.seasonsonline.ca and click on *Spirit Sightings*. Bring information that might inform this week’s session.
- ❑ Bring Bibles, matches, and [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2), and if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Set a worship space with green cloth, candle, and Bible.
- ❑ Bring resource sheet “[Gathering Prayers](#)” (p. 81) and choose one of the prayers.
- ❑ Bring, if possible, “To You, O God” (p. 40 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #17 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Engage

- ❑ Bring resource sheet “[Suffering and Sacrament](#)” and copies of resource sheet “[Harvest](#).”

Respond

Choose from the options provided. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Dig deeper:** copies of this week’s resource sheet “[Suffering and Sacrament](#)”
- ❑ **Job descriptions:** no additional materials needed
- ❑ **Service projects:** copies of resource sheet “[Discipleship Projects](#)” (p. 84)
- ❑ **Spiritual practice:** Christ candle, Bible, bell/singing bowl

Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song, “Friend to Friend” (p. 16 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #28 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).
- ❑ Bring copies of [biblical background](#) material for October 28 (p. 51).



A New Way

Scripture

Mark 10:35–45

FOCUS To explore how greatness grows out of serving rather than personal privilege.

Gather

Opening ritual

Gather around the worship space and invite a volunteer to light the candle.

Pray Lead the group in one of the prayers on the resource sheet “[Gathering Prayers](#)” (p. 81).

Sing or listen to, if possible, “To You, O God” (p. 40 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #17 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Moving into the theme

People make thousands of choices every day. Those choices range from the modest (What will I wear today?) to the complex (How can I propose solve this problem? Should I stay in this relationship?).

- **What do you do when faced with a difficult life choice?**
- **If you were face-to-face with Jesus, what questions would you ask?**

Engage

Setting the context

In last week’s reading from Mark’s gospel, Jesus used an encounter with a rich person to help the disciples understand that service, not wealth, is the key to living in God’s realm. In between that reading and this week’s are several verses in which Jesus, for the third time, tells his followers that suffering awaits him in Jerusalem. Jesus and the disciples are now living in a time of transition and uncertainty. Invite group members to consider what fear causes some people to do when facing situations of uncertainty about leadership.

Exploring the texts

James and John ask Jesus for special privileges and positions of authority.

- **Think about greatness as privilege, and greatness as responsibility for service. How are they different? How are they similar?**

Think of a place in life where you are in a leadership position. Imagine you hear Jesus telling you to turn things upside down, and you take it literally.

- **What does this challenge you to do as a leader? (Be bold and daring in imagining this – no one is looking!)**

Invite volunteer readers for the roles of narrator, Jesus, James and John, and read **Mark 10:35–45**.

Review the information about “Honour” on the bottom of the resource sheet “[Suffering and Sacrament](#).”

- **What are James and John trying to do?**
- **What do you think they really want?**

Note that Jesus did not condemn of the initial request made by James and John. And when the other disciples became angry, Jesus did not take sides in the dispute.

- **In what ways might the request of James and John – and the disciples’ ensuing anger about it – be expressions of fear?**

Mark 10:35–45 takes place in the midst of the third time that Jesus teaches about his death and resurrection, and what it means to be great in God’s reign. Compare Mark 10:43–44 with Mark 8:34–35, and Mark 9:35–37.

- **How would these statements have been seen as a great reversal in Mark’s time?**
- **How might these statements be seen as a great reversal in your community’s culture today?**
- **Think about greatness as privilege, and greatness as responsibility for service. How are they different? How are they similar?**

Other readings Invite group members to review the other readings: **Job 38:1–7 (34–41)**; **Psalm 104:1–9, 24, 35c**; **Hebrews 5:1–10**. Discuss together:

- **What do we learn of greatness and/or service from these readings?**

Making life connections

Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Harvest” and read together this contemporary story of ser-

vice. Invite group members to compare the perception of greatness and leadership evident in society today with the model that Jesus presents in Mark 10:35–45.

- **What examples of servant leadership have you experienced or witnessed in your life?**
- **In what ways might you and your congregation model and encourage servant leadership?**

Respond

Choose one or more of the following options.

- ❑ **Dig deeper: cup and baptism** Service invites us to share community with God and one another in ways that are beyond self-serving. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Suffering and Sacrament” and read the material together, looking up the scripture references. Discuss together the questions on the resource sheet.
- ❑ **Job descriptions** Jesus’ teaching about the concept of servant leadership remains an important image of leadership in the church today. Form two groups and invite one group to create a job description for a “Chief executive officer” of a modern company. Invite the other group to create a job description for a “Servant leader.” Use such categories as overall functions, major tasks, reporting process. Share lists and then discuss the ways in which the tasks of a servant leader are the same as and differ from those of a CEO.
- ❑ **Service project** Jesus’ teaching invites us to consider ways in which we can be servant leaders



too. One way is to engage in a project which provides service to another. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Discipleship Projects” (p. 84) and review options. Choose one or more projects and plan how these might be carried out.

- ❑ **Spiritual practice – Silence** It is part of our Christian tradition to seek the Spirit in silence. Creativity and courage is often born from this “place.” Set a table with only a simple Christ candle and a “singing bowl” or bell. To begin, sound the bowl/bell and invite members to let their consciousness “follow the sound into silence.” Pause, and then read Mark 10:43b–45 into the silence. Sit in silence for at least five to ten minutes so people can sink into stillness. At the end of the silent time, sound the bell/bowl again. Offer the following prayer or one of your own: “O God, the breath within our breath, the silence in our stillness, the peace within our hearts, grant us the spirit, wisdom, and strength to live and move and have our being in you, now and always. Amen.”

Bless

Gather around the lit candle.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song “Friend to Friend” (p. 16 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #28 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Pray the prayer on the biblical background page (p. 45).

Blessing Say the words that Jesus spoke to James and John: “What do you want me to do for you?”

and invite group members to spend a few moments in silence, considering how they might respond. Next, invite them to turn to face away from the worship space, imagining facing the world into which God is sending them. As they consider the needs in the world that God might address through them, invite them to imagine asking another, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Distribute the biblical background material for October 28 (p. 51).

Reflect

If there are those who struggle with low self-esteem in your group, consider how you might encourage and empower them to see themselves as gifted children of God?



Harvest

One thing I love about harvest time is the way it brings communities together. Well, naturally – have you ever tried to harvest on your own? Harvesting is more the stuff of choirs than of soloists! Maybe if you have a very small garden you can do all the picking by yourself, but I'll bet even then there is a lot of sharing going on – spare squash and zucchinis handed over the fence, a bouquet of gladioli for the altar in the community church, jars of jam and chutney sent to friends and family with a hand-written label and a special slip of ribbon.

About 30 years ago, I learned that if your garden is at all large you will need other people to help with the harvest. Back then, I was a member of a small community of young people who operated a "House of Hospitality" in Griffintown, a very poor neighbourhood in downtown Montreal, where the refugees from the Irish potato famine had found a new home. A century and a half later, our community continued to provide food and shelter to the homeless, and operated a community centre, which offered support for the children and families of the area. At that time, harvesting was a very urban thing for us, as we went out in teams early every morning to scrounge food from dumpsters at the commercial markets!

Late one summer, our friends Jim and Anne, "back-to-the-landers" with five small children on a 200-acre farm, sent an urgent appeal to our community to help them bring in their harvest. A couple of us who had never even been on a farm before were sent deep into rural Quebec, with the notion that we might also find there an opportunity for a bit of rest and renewal in the peaceful countryside.

On the first day, I was given an antique two-handed scythe and introduced to a 15-acre hay field. I have never in my life, before or since, been as utterly exhausted as I was that first week. It didn't matter that the farm had no electricity, because every evening I was fast asleep long before the sun went down. One day I did actually fall asleep with my face in my supper plate!

When I wasn't feeling exhausted, I was feeling overwhelmed and way, way over my head. I realized that I had come to the farm knowing absolutely nothing about harvesting. I certainly hadn't appreciated how much hard, physical work it takes to support and sustain us every day. But I learned all that – especially about perseverance and the importance of working together on things that matter. We got that hay mown and, with the help of an old horse named Buckingham, we even managed to get it raked, cured, and put away in the barn. We also picked and preserved a lot of vegetables and churned many pails of cream.

That winter was cold and harsh, but we had the comfort of knowing that the work we did probably made the difference in helping Jim, Anne, and the children make it through to another spring. And every month or so, a package would arrive on our bitter, windswept doorstep in the city – hefty beef roasts, rich rounds of cheese, and sparkling jars of red and yellow preserves – sweet farm treats for our winter soup-kitchen.

I've always thought that the Jewish calendar got it right by celebrating the New Year (Rosh Hashanah) at the beginning of harvest season. May we all have a great year and a plentiful harvest to share. And may we enjoy harvesting together!

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Suffering and Sacrament

“Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”

(Mark 10:38)

The images of **Cup** (communion) and **Baptism** are part of the sacramental life of Christians. But when Jesus addresses James and John he uses imagery that is associated with suffering. That context is strengthened when it is remembered that immediately preceding this passage is Jesus’ third prediction of his suffering (**Mark 10:32–34**).

Cup and suffering

The prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures connected “cup” with the idea of punishment or dire threat. Read **Isaiah 51:17** and **Jeremiah 25:15–16**. This ominous character of the “cup” takes clear shape in Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane: “remove this cup from me” (**Mark 14:36**).

Baptism and suffering

Baptism as practiced by John the Baptizer and the Essenes (a Jewish community at the time of Jesus whose members adhered strictly to Jewish law) involved a full immersion in water. In Hebrew Scriptures, being immersed or “overwhelmed” by waters was an allusion to death or its nearness (**Psalms 42:7**). God’s presence offered the promise of deliverance from the threatening waters (**Isaiah 43:2**) even as God redeemed Israel from Egypt through parted waters (**Exodus 14:21–22**). Paul’s writings on the meaning of baptism frequently contain allusions to “dying” in Christ. So Jesus’ reference to baptism brings to mind both threat and promise.

“Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant.”

(Mark 10:43)

In this teaching the Greek word translated as “servant” (*diakonos*) is often translated as “minister” in the New Testament. Ministry (*diakonia*) is, in its most basic meaning, service to others, and came from a term used in reference to a household servant who served at the table. So here Jesus explains that the basis of community and greatness is “being of service to others” rather than “being great.” In his life Jesus sets the tone and example of the servant leader. Jesus asks James and John what they want, and then provides what they (and now the whole community) need: the truth that greatness comes in service.

- **In what ways does the leadership in our church illustrate Jesus’ teaching?**
- **What wisdom does Jesus’ teaching bring to the service offered by the church?**

HONOUR

In the request of James and John we see a struggle for honour. One strongly held social value of cultures in the Middle East, both in ancient and contemporary times, is the importance of family and clan honour. A person’s identity and place in the community is defined by this social indicator, and the defence of one’s family honour is a primary concern. Honour is communally given and it is a social obligation to defend the honour of the social groups to which one belongs. In Jesus’ time, a great deal of one’s behaviour in society revolved around preserving one’s honour.

Gathering Prayers

Creator God,
Open our ears to the voice of wisdom
that we hear in many ways.

_____ Open our lives to your creating, guiding, love. Amen.

Loving God, you receive us with grace.

May we discern, in the scriptures and our conversations,
the call to be an embodiment of your love. Amen. _____

May we take heart, O God,
in your presence that opens to us,
in your power that brings wholeness,

_____ and in your grace that invites our own gracious response. Amen.

We give thanks, O God,
for your presence in our lives.

We give thanks for people in our community
who bear your presence to us.

In our turning to you, O God,
turn us toward one another. Amen. _____

God of all time and place,
May we be open to your Spirit,
sustained with hope and faith in your presence,

_____ and strengthened to create places of sanctuary for all. Amen.

One: From our busyness and pressure, we call to you.

All: Be our quiet centre, O God (*pause*).

One: From our lack of faith and blindness, we call to you.

All: Be our vision, O God (*pause*).

One: From our worries and fears, we call to you.

All: Be our peace, O God (*pause*).

One: From our good times and success, we call to you.

All: Be our hope, O God (*pause*).

All: Amen. _____



Discipleship Projects

Giving Tree Visit community groups to learn about their work (for example, women's shelter, daycare programs for teen mothers, or community kitchen). Choose a program to support and find out what they need. Place a large branch covered with clothes pegs in a container. Decorate the branch with pictures of what is needed by the program. Invite the congregation to participate in collecting materials. Deliver the donations to the program.

Fun fair Host a "fun fair" for children during school breaks. Plan activities (such as Bible storytelling, games, art and craft projects, drama) and prepare snacks. Ask for a freewill donation from families to benefit a denominational outreach program or local program.

Caring for Creation Research local environmental needs related to streambeds, parks, wildlife projects, or community gardens. Plan a project to aid one of these programs. For example, participate in a cleanup or planting project. Raise funds for wildlife projects.

Discipleship calendars Research twelve different mission/outreach projects in which your church or denomination participates. Create an illustrate for each project. Make calendars, including illustrations and brief information about each project. Use a computer or arrange with a print shop to print and bind the calendar pages. Sell the calendars and give the proceeds to one of the projects.

Living the creed Review the creed or statement of belief that your church uses or your church's mission statement. Brainstorm ideas for group projects or personal deeds to carry out each of the statements. Prepare a display outlining the chosen activities and invite others to participate.

Serving others Find out services (for example, garden help, painting, childcare) that you could perform for people in need in your congregation or community. Plan how to provide one of these. Or plan an auction of services for your congregation following a church dinner. Print a list of services that members are willing to provide and have an auctioneer accept the bids. Use the funds raised to support a community or church project.

Hunger awareness Participate in one of these activities to raise awareness of issues of hunger and to raise funds for specific projects.

