

Status

By Rev. Todd Farnsworth

Mark 9:30-37



30 They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, 31 because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." 32 But they did not understand what he meant

and were afraid to ask him about it. 33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" 34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. 35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." 36 He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

Yesterday afternoon at precisely 2:28 (Beicke Time) the procession which lead to the wedding of Kevin Beicke and Erica Castenada began.

It was lead by Grandma and Grandpa Castenada

Parents of the Groom were next

Bearers of the Veil and then Bearers of the Cord (two lovely traditions from the Philippines)

After that came the bridesmaids and ushers. Junior bridesmaids, Junior Ushers

Maid of Honor

Flower Girl

And finally, the guest of Honor, the Bride and her parents. The icing on top of the cake.

There was a pecking order. There always is one. Every wedding couple has to decide who to honor and when to honor them. You know that you're loved (but not *quite* as much) if you fall somewhere in the middle part of the procession. If you're a guest who thought you were the bride's "best friend" but you're not marching in the line, it can get a bit chilly. "I didn't like those dresses they had to wear anyway!"

And beyond the wedding party there are other status challenging players.

There is the chauffeur, the photographer, videographer, wedding planner, organist, musicians, guests (and that has its own subcategory of relatives, friends, work associates, people the couple doesn't know but Dad insisted had to be there or he wasn't paying for an open bar) and minister.

Everyone trying to figure out how much authority they have. Everyone vying for their piece of the pie. It's can be incredibly stressful!

Every couple has to sort it out and the whole status thing can get pretty complicated. Egos are sometimes bruised. Chips become lodged on shoulders. I've seen it happen. I usually try to warn the couple to think about these things before the rehearsal. If they can, I advise making these decisions of order *before* the rehearsal. Takes some of the reshuffling of bodies pain out of the experience.

“No, I’m sorry Aunt Zelda, you’ll be third in line, not second...” “Excuse me, what’s your name? But this row is reserved for friends of the groom.”

Jesus has just announced his impending death to the people he is closest. He has gotten them away from the crowds (lower status) so that he can tell them this important news (higher status). And after a moment of confusion, they begin vying to be his replacement. Mark tells us they were wondering about which row they were going to end up in! They were arguing about “who was the greatest.” They were trying to figure out the pecking order, the status they would hold, when Jesus was not around anymore.

To be honest, it was easy when he was among them. There was Jesus, the teacher, and there were his disciples, the inner core of learners. And then there were the folks who followed them around, and the folks who showed up out of curiosity. It was easy...sort of. Because there were also the Pharisees (who held religious authority). There were the Roman soldiers. There were the people who came to be healed. They all played a part in the pageant. They all had a perception about their status.

I wonder if you ever wonder about *your* status?

It’s an important thing to consider.

- If it weren’t then it wouldn’t matter much if an office manager insisted that her employees buy her drinks after work.
- It wouldn’t matter if a CEO made advances on a custodian at the company.

- It wouldn't matter if a professor slept with one of his students.

Have you ever wondered about your status? Have you ever asserted your authority to get something from someone you thought had less authority? Or maybe you weren't sure...so what harm could it do?

Honestly, when I walk into a room as a minister, I am very aware of my status, and that status can change depending on who is in the room. Coffee hour, Board meeting, Worship, Office, Pastoral care, Hospital visit, Clergy gathering, Funeral, Wedding: each setting I have a different status. You do, too. You may not be aware of it, but you hold status wherever you go. Sometimes it's high. Sometimes it's low. Sometimes it's in the murky middle.

The disciples weren't sure about how their status was about to shift, and so Jesus sat down to teach them a lesson. Fortunately, it is a lesson that makes our lives a bit easier. He said:

"Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

Jesus says, if you want to have my authority or status, then presume you are at the lowest rung of the social order, and seek to serve the person you are with. Don't try to get something out of them. Instead, try to figure out how you can make their life a little easier...a little safer...a little better.

Servants in Jesus day had virtually no status. They were lower in status than slaves. Servants were usually hired as day workers. They did not live with the family or share their food. They got money for doing a job. They were like the folks who clean our houses or mow our lawns today. They were like the servers at a reception or the cashiers at our favorite

restaurant. They expected nothing more. That was it. Jesus is telling his inner circle, if you want to know your status, it is “servant.”

And before you get to thinking, “Awesome, at least I can tell the kids around me what to do, because they are even lower than me in the pecking order...”

36 He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, 37 “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

Jesus turns the conventional wisdom of his day upside down and tells his friends that, not only are they to be servants to those who they perceive to have the power to pay them something, but they are to welcome the powerless into their midst. They are to receive and minister to those who can give nothing in return. They are to listen to them, respect them, honor them, care for them...and in doing so, receive God. Jesus means that for the disciples. He means it in the city square. He means it in the countryside. He means it for wherever they find themselves...wherever we find ourselves. In church, at school, in our cubicle at work, outdoors at a park. He means it for us when we are in the office or at coffee hour. He means it for when we are sitting in a meeting or walking to raise money for people who are hungry. Jesus calls us to live a servants life with our words and deeds...like he did...and assume that status in every relationship we find ourselves in. It takes the guesswork out of it. It makes things clearer. Instead of trying to figure out our power, we behave as if we have none. Fortunately, Erica and Kevin did a pretty good job of organizing and pre planning their wedding. They really thought about how to make folks feel

comfortable and cared for. They had people greet guests at the door. They worked explanations of new customs into their ceremony. They included everyone in the celebration of their love for one another by providing a variety of foods and music at their reception. They sought to serve even in the midst of their wedding day...a pretty neat trick.

Jesus teaches us to imagine a world where those who have social status behave in ways that are respectful and caring. It takes some practice, but I believe the rewards are heavenly...like icing on a wedding cake. Amen.