

How's your posture? Now I'm not talking about the kind of posture that my mother demanded at the dinner table: "Sit up straight, shoulders back, no elbows on the table!" I'm talking, instead, about posture as the way we approach the world, how we hold ourselves, what attitudes we adopt, how we "show up" in our homes, our families, our neighborhoods, our schools, our workplaces, our communities. Do you have a posture of suspicion or inquisitiveness, a posture of hospitality or guardedness, a posture ready to learn or resistant to change? What is your approach, your attitude, toward life, toward yourself, toward others?

What's Jesus posture? How does he show up in Mark's gospel? So far, until Chapter 8, it's warm and welcoming. Jesus' posture is invitational: he invites people to follow him. It's also charismatic; when he invites them, they follow, immediately. His posture is authoritative but not authoritarian; those who listen to him teach identify him as "having authority, not as the scribes," who rely on their tradition. Jesus, instead, speaks with his own authority. His posture is also compassionate, perceptive, firm, nonjudgmental, wise, and responsive. Up to this point, to summarize, it's warm and welcoming.

Once the disciples begin to identify Jesus as Messiah, as Peter does in last week's gospel, however, they begin to see another facet of his posture. So far, he's presented himself as one who cares, heals, teaches, and shares God's love with everyone. While he is adversarial with the Pharisees, his posture toward the people is warm. When Peter calls Jesus "Messiah," he expects him to keep healing the blind, the lame, and the deaf, to keep feeding people, and to keep forgiving sins, but he also expects him to right wrongs, to shake up the Roman oppressors and free the Jews. The posture Peter and the disciples expect from Jesus as Messiah is one of might and right.

Peter is disappointed, maybe even disillusioned, when Jesus tells them who Messiah is, what Messiah does, and how Messiah lives. First, Jesus, Messiah, presents himself as a servant of all, as one who will be betrayed and killed; he reveals a posture of servanthood rather than a posture of might and right. Then Jesus explains that the disciples' posture, too, will be one of servanthood, that those who follow him will deny self and take up the cross; they, like him, will be last of all and servant of all. The disciples' primary posture, like Jesus' posture, will be one, not of power, but of servanthood.

Over the centuries, Jesus' disciples have, indeed, followed him and imitated his posture of servanthood, denying self and taking up their cross. I think of three disciples who, in the last century, have followed Jesus literally to death. Each imitated Jesus, serving others, denying themselves, and taking up their particular cross. All three, raised in Christian homes and educated with some measure of privilege, were ascending as professional clergy in their denominations: Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Baptist, but each chose, instead of might and right, a posture of servanthood.

Who are these three disciples? Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Oscar Romero. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was raised in a well-established and wealthy Lutheran family in Berlin in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Hitler was coming into power, he declined a job offer in New York City, which would have

kept him safe. Instead, he founded an underground seminary in Nazi Germany and joined a plot on Hitler's life, which led to his execution in 1945, days before his concentration camp was liberated.

Martin Luther King, Jr., the son of a Baptist preacher, was raised in a community of black professionals in Atlanta, Georgia. A leader in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's, he advocated non-violent resistance to racist policies and practices. Giving up the safety of anonymity, he spoke out boldly against racism, poverty, and the Vietnam War until his assassination in Memphis, Tennessee in 1968.

Oscar Romero was ascending the ladder of leadership in the Roman Catholic Church in El Salvador in the 1970's, from priest, to auxiliary bishop, to bishop, to Archbishop of El Salvador, when his good friend and fellow priest was murdered. He urged the government to investigate the murder, but got no response. He met with the pope to request condemnation of his government's human rights violations and wrote to President Carter to criticize U.S. policy in El Salvador. On March 24, 1980, after preaching that Salvadoran soldiers must cease violence as their Christian duty, he was shot at the altar while saying mass.

Each of these followers of Jesus, having encountered the suffering of his neighbors, denied himself and took up the cross, giving up professional privilege and personal safety for the sake of others. They each left a legacy of their posture of servanthood. Bonhoeffer gave up the safety of a professorship at an American seminary, Romero a comfortable position as an archbishop in cahoots with the corrupt government, King a pulpit focused on spiritual matters. Bonhoeffer, Romero, and King each denied self, took up his cross, and lived a life of service to others, losing his life when he stood his ground against powerful forces of government or church or society.

Not every disciple of Jesus who chooses a servant posture literally loses his life, of course. Others, too, have followed Jesus and denied self and served others to a ripe old age. Katherine Drexel, for example, born in Philadelphia, had access to great wealth. Listen to her family legacy. One uncle, Anthony, had enough money to bail out U.S. governmental agencies three times. Another uncle, Joseph, left the family banking business to become a benefactor of the New York Philharmonic, the Metropolitan Opera, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Natural History, and the New York Public Library. Katherine's father, Francis and her stepmother Emma, who "regarded [their] vast wealth merely as a Divinely-lent instrument for doing good," distributed food, clothing, and rent subsidies three times a week from their home in Philadelphia and visited widows too proud to come to them. Katherine, who stood to inherit a fortune, received many marriage proposals, but she chose to abandon family life and her fortune to found an order of Roman Catholic sisters dedicated to serving impoverished black and Native people. Her posture was one of servanthood. Katherine didn't lose her life, but she let go of wealth and family life in order to serve the poor.

Katherine Drexel, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr., Oscar Romero. Each left us a legacy of their posture of servanthood. They lived their lives in ways that demonstrated a joyful denial of self, a deliberate taking up of the cross, a daily serving of others. What is your posture as a follower of Jesus? How do you deny yourself and take up your cross? What sort of legacy is your life creating? While it's unlikely that God is calling you to give up your life—or to give up great wealth—to serve others, your posture as a disciple matters. What is your posture as a follower of Jesus?

Jesus taught his disciples, who were eager to figure out who was “first,” who was the greatest, and who mattered the most, that in his reign, among those who followed him, status and rank are irrelevant. Who is the most intelligent or the best at math or the quickest on the football field or the one who makes the most on the stock market doesn’t matter a whit in the reign of Jesus. Who has the best Body Mass Index or the biggest house or the fastest car is not the measure of one’s fitness to follow Jesus. Instead, what matters is your posture: how you approach the world, how you “show up” in your home, your family, your neighborhood, your school, your workplace, your community. Jesus dramatically underlines this posture of impartiality in his reign by placing into the midst of his disciples one who was, literally, least in his society: a child, one who had no rights, no voice, and barely a 50% chance of living until adulthood. Jesus placed a child in the midst of his disciples to show them whom to welcome and how to welcome. By taking a child into his arms, Jesus demonstrated a posture of welcome.

What is our posture at King of Kings? Is it one of welcome and service or might and right? Do we receive someone who was born outside the U.S. as a fellow child of God? Do we choose to welcome people based on their income or family configuration or the color of their skin? Do we prefer someone who arrives alone, or with a partner, or with children? Are we more ready to welcome someone who wears a tie than someone who wears shorts? What is our posture as we open our doors to newcomers? Are we forming a legacy of welcome, to anyone who comes through our doors?

My friends, Jesus stands at the door of King of Kings and welcomes us, just as we are, happily married or lonely or trying to figure out our relationship status. He welcomes us who have ancestors from within our shores and those who came from other continents. He welcomes those among us who have bank accounts or CD’s or stocks as well as those who are unemployed or on public assistance. He welcomes third graders and third year grad students, septuagenarians and sixteen-year-olds. He offers us a legacy of servanthood and models a welcoming posture to all who enter our doors. And then he invites each of us to follow him and to imitate his posture, so that all, each and every one who knocks on those doors, may be welcomed and affirmed and blessed in his name. AMEN