

*They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, "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." (Mark 9:33-37 NIV)*

Dear friends of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ: Have you seen those pictures of the migrants fleeing across the Mediterranean? Thousands are leaving their homelands, fleeing war and persecution, trying to make it to safety on the other side. Boats, vessels, ships filled to the brim. No space to spare. Every seat precious and every niche to sleep costly. Demand is pushing the prices. It is quite shocking to see, how late-comers are pushed back. When the boat is full, those who are still trying desperately to climb in anyway are forcefully rejected, pushed, shoved and left behind. We hear of others even who, when the water is nearly finished, the space is too little and the aggression levels rise – are seized and without much ceremony thrust overboard. Perhaps because they were Christians, perhaps because they were not of the same clan/tribe/nation? But thrown overboard to drown desperately in the dark, cold waters of the ocean. Sadly there's no big fish to come to their rescue. They're just fish food after all. This human trafficking is supposed to be more lucrative than all global drug dealings. There's a ton of money being made while people are paying with their lives for it. Some survive, others don't. All are desperate for a better life and they are striving at all costs to make it – even if it means tramping others down and going over corpses – as long as I get out on top!

The disciples are following Jesus. They have recognised him as the very Son of the heavenly Father, the one, who is one with the Father, very God of very God. That's what they believe. That's why they are following him through thick and thin. They have seen that he is Lord of all. He provides heavenly abundance in the desert, turns water into wine and feeds thousands with but a few loaves. He cures the ill, casts out demons, seeks out those, who are lost and brings them back home and even those, who have passed on from life to death are returned by his mighty word and effective calling: "Lazarus – come out!" They want to be with Jesus – follow him – be close to him – and thus have a part in his heavenly bliss and glory, a slice of the cake – hopefully a big slice – yes the biggest slice will do just fine. Each one of them would like to be the biggest and greatest and first amongst them – someone like St. Peter. Always at the cutting edge, in the front line to defend Jesus, eager to outjump the others into the danger zone, ready to risk all and everything at least until it becomes dangerous, the waves tower above and the storm roars just too ferociously or the little girl touches but the wrong nerve: "Your dialect betrays you!" or the leaves rustle in the wind or the legalistic Jews point their accusing finger: "He's eating with the gentiles." Then the hot air balloon of our ego is deflated in no time, we're eager to step back and out of the firing line, our eagerness to be first and biggest is nowhere to be found if the going gets tough and the call for the extra-mile is voiced.

Remember when Jesus got down on his knees to wash his disciples' feet? Nobody joined him in that service. It was the Lord only, who girded himself, got down on the floor and washed the dirt of those tired, worn-out and dusty feet. Peter even thought, he could do without this washing until Jesus told him: "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" (Joh 13:8-9 NIV)

Our Lord Jesus Christ has not only washed us from all sin, overcome all evil for us and freed us from the power of the devil, hell and death. Our Lord Jesus Christ has granted us God's favour, adopted us as his

brothers & sisters and made us part of God's family – never mind our origin, our background, ability, skills and learning. He has forgiven us all our shortcomings of not living up to God's benchmarks, our animosity against each other, our evil bragging and make-believe-as-if we are something more special than we are, our sinful desire to be the greatest – and even our so terrible craving and ingrained aspiration to be like God himself. He has covered up and cleaned up and forgiven our habits of not serving others with the God-given-gifts we have, but rather seeking to be served by others. Standing in their way: "Don't let the children come to him!"

Oh yes, we human beings even in the not so romantic outback of the African bush or in the jungle of the megacities on this continent also would like to stand first in line for God's goodness, light and life. Sometimes we don't even shun back from shoving back others and making sure, that they are well behind and below us – even if it is just by backstabbing, badmouthing and vicious spitefulness. Just think of the burning shops of foreigners, how people who don't speak Zulu are kicked out of a driving taxi or how migrant workers are persecuted most harshly even today and in these our lands. Do foreigners/migrants and strangers find a home/sanctuary in our congregation & church – or is it more like our private and family turf?

That's why Jesus came and sought out those, who were last in the row, the smallest in the pecking order, those overlooked by the high and mighty: *Come to me all of you, who are tired and heavily burdened. I will give you rest!* Zacchaeus – come down – and that day Jesus can conclude: "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luk 19:9-10 NIV) The Samaritan women tells her village people about the one, who's sitting at the well and they finally confess: "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world." (Joh 4:42 NIV) Zacchaeus gives back 4x of his wealth. The Samaritan women doesn't keep the good news to herself, but shares it with the other villagers: "Come, see and taste how friendly the Lord is!"

Now even in our service, we as faithful Christians, would love to do the greatest and biggest and first service. Be the most humble, the furthest to the back and the most outstanding servant of all! It's just another form of that self-seeking boasting, who of them was the greatest. That's why our Lord Jesus taking the child in his arms, said to them, *"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."* You see, it's not so much about the service you would like to do or the position you would like to hold, but rather that you heed God's calling and do that task and work that he would have you do – faithfully, diligently and always trusting, loving and fearing him above all else. Washing the dirty baby, that he has entrusted to you. Teaching that illiterate boy, that needs your tuition most. Feeding that beggar, who is at your door. Going about the business that you have been called by God to take care of! Oh Lord my God and heavenly Father – not mine, but your will be done! Not despising yourself for it, but rather serving your Lord and master gratefully and sincerely even as you go about washing the feet of your brethren. Glad that the Lord has given you the opportunity to serve him. For remember there will come the night, when nobody can do anything anymore. The glass of water that is given to the smallest and most insignificant brother or sister will not go unnoticed by the Lord. He, who feeds us with grace and abounding life, gives us quite enough to share and do good to others too. Nobody is short changed by our Lord. We don't need to shove others back on the way to the promised land, but rather can promote, help and do good to those with us on the way. In his one, holy Christian Church – the boat and vessel of salvation – there is room for all. It is a true sanctuary in all storms of life, especially for those, who need it most – for the Lord himself is good and his mercy endures forever. Amen.