

The Message: The Cost of Intimacy

They already had a sense of power. James and John

- came from a family with some social status.
- were among the first to become disciples.
- they have already featured prominently throughout Jesus' ministry.



James and John were close to Jesus. But they worried that this closeness wouldn't last out eternity, so they asked him to do just one thing for them: 'let us sit next to you forever.'

One is initially struck by their sheer arrogance of conspiring together to supplant the other disciples.

But I confess I have tried to get to a teacher early to convince them how special my kid was. From 1 - 3 am, my husband and daughter each at their own computer, clicked madly to get seats for the London version of "Harry Potter: the Cursed Child." I slept soundly, till they erupted at the moment of success.

We are all guilty at some point of wanting to be first, close to the action, at the front of the line.

But I am drawn to the deep **yearning** of James and John. Perhaps that desire for closeness had something to do with their need to be insulated from disaster. 'If we are close to Jesus, nothing can go wrong!'

What if they were afraid of losing their intimate relationship with Jesus?

This week I met with the mother and brother of a young man who died by his own hand.

In that moment, I heard, over and over again, "Jesus wept."

"When Martha came weeping to Jesus to tell him her brother Lazarus was dead, he was deeply moved. Jesus wept."

Jesus wept.

Jesus has chosen to throw in his lot with us, and the cost for him is tears. He is intimately caught up in our grief.

Perhaps it isn't power or place that the disciples want but rather an eternally intimate relationship with Jesus. They have been his closest disciples and they think that they know what it will take to continue that closeness eternally.

What did Jesus understand that they didn't?

I The first is that intimacy involves suffering.

When he hears what they want, Jesus is flabbergasted. He asks if they are ready to suffer as he will, if they will be able to pay the cost of being in such intimate relationship with him.

He knows that they will suffer; (history teaches us that James was the first to die, and by the sword); they will live out their baptism -- but God is the one who plans eternity, Jesus tells them.

People who don't know God, often think of God as distant. The mother who came to plan her son's funeral didn't want too much 'God' in the funeral -- and I knew she meant the kind of God I don't believe in -- uninvolved, judgmental, uncaring or even vengeful. The kind of God atheists don't believe in.

But then we hear John, the Gospel writer,

"No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made God known." (John 1.18)

And we know that God **is** a God who knows us personally, privately and cares for us intimately

Jesus is the best hint of what God is like because Jesus is close to God's heart.

And if we know Jesus, then It is in the midst of our grief, as our hearts break, that God enters in.

Jesus is the argument against that kind of impersonal God. In the midst of grief, brokenness; he is intimately present, taking on our suffering. Jesus wept.

The cost of intimacy is suffering, and **service**..

II How do the other ten disciples react when they hear what James and John have been up to? Thinking the two are after power, they are angry. But Jesus corrects them.

"You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them."

'You are thinking about relationships in communities where **power replaces intimacy** as the prime commodity.'

Do you know [The Story of Mouseland](#) by Tommy Douglas in 1944?

Tommy Douglas was first a Christian minister, second a storyteller and third a great Canadian politician.

Mouseland was a place where all the little mice lived and played, were born and died.

They even had a Parliament. And every four years they had an election.

On election day all the little mice used to go to the ballot box and they used to elect a government. A government made up of black cats.

All the laws were good laws. For cats. But, oh, they were hard on the mice. And when the mice couldn't put up with it any more, they voted the black cats out. . . . They put in the white cats.

Now the white cats said: "The trouble with Mouseland is those round mouseholes we've got. If you put us in we'll establish square mouseholes." And they did. And the square mouseholes were twice as big as the round mouseholes, and now the cat could get both his paws in.

You see, the trouble wasn't with the colour of the cat. The trouble was that they were cats. And because they were cats, they naturally looked after cats instead of mice.

This was first century Palestine. Those Roman cats weren't about to keep their paws out of the mouseholes of the people of Israel. For some, it may feel uncomfortably familiar today.

Jesus told the disciples, 'you better not think that some of you can have power over the others. None of you will follow me if you try to be first over the others.'

'Rather,' he teaches, 'the heart of intimacy is not power, but service.'

The cost of intimacy with Jesus is to serve.

Suffering and **servicing**, characteristics of the intimate relationship we are called to have with Jesus and God.

It's that kind of intimacy that Jesus introduced to human relationships.

We are potentially embarking on a journey that could bring us intimately close to people who are now strangers. I asked you last week to think of your best experience here -- one where you felt your spirit soar or your heart strangely warmed, one where you felt at home.

Tong has inspired us with her story today.

in her story is suffering and welcoming and belonging and service. It is a story of God's power to transform a life through love.

Yours doesn't have to be a huge story, but yours is the story I would like you to think about in the coming weeks and prepare to tell it to a stranger, and to hear their story -- to help you to move into intimacy even if there is some suffering, some giving up, opening up; even if there is more service required for you to reach out beyond your already comfortable circle of friends, beyond your own shyness, your own need for privacy.

Suffering and service: Jesus hoped the disciples would continue to serve others after he left, even when it meant suffering. It's what he wanted for his followers, for his church, for the world.

It's not such a bad vision is it? Where love for others rules our hearts and actions.

That's the **benefit of intimacy**.