

## Beyond the Rat Race

### Mark 10:35-45

#### Squid Game

I believe most of you use cell-phones and some of you even use smart-phones. Technology really has made our lives convenient. Of course, there is also a downside to it. Nowadays, young people tend to use text messaging rather than actually speaking to each other. Even when people gather, they are often looking at their cell-phones. [ppt] If Jesus Christ was raised from the tomb today, it would might like this. [ppt] Smart phones and video games have even changed how our kids play. Once upon a time, there were no smartphones, no internet, and no video games. Do you remember those days? [ppt] At that time, we played freeze tag, 'green light, red light,' 'Capture the Flag,' hide-and-seek. What were your favorite childhood outdoor games?

My favorite childhood game was called squid game. Have you ever heard of it? To play this game, you need to draw a special outline like this. [ppt] It looks like a squid. The rules are simple. Children are divided into two groups: the offense and the defense. Once the game starts, the defense can run around on two feet within bounds, while the offense outside the line is only allowed to hop on one foot. If an attacker cuts through the waist of the squid, he or she can walk freely on two feet. Of course, the defenders try to block them from cutting through that bridge. When ready, the attackers gather at the entrance of the squid and attempt the final attack. In order to win, the attackers must tap the small closed-off space on the squid's head with their foot. It sounds fun, although I wouldn't dare ask you play it with me.

When I played this game with my friends, we sometimes played for hours. During the game, we competed with each other to win and there were winners and losers, but when it was done, we all had fun and went home smiling. That's how child's play ends and why children gather to play again and again. Children's play often includes some competition but it's just a small part of it, so they enjoy the game regardless of the result. Unfortunately, as we grow up, we gradually lose this sense of playfulness and fun because our lives turn to serious competition.

#### Disciples rat racing for status

In today's scripture, we can see Jesus disciples competing with one another for higher position. James and John came to Jesus and said, "teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." If your children asked you the same question, what would your reaction be? You would assume that they would be asking for something really big or important. Right? "What is it you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked. They answered, "Arrange it, so that we will be awarded the highest places of honor in your glory—one of us at your right, the other at your left." At the time Jesus was heading toward Jerusalem and James and John might have assumed that Jesus would restore the kingdom of Israel. When a new king established a kingdom, normally those who had worked for the new king were rewarded according to their contribution. James and John seemed to want to secure first place for themselves. According to the gospel of Mark, Andrew and Peter were the first disciples called by Jesus Christ. James and John were the second. They might have been aware of this and so these brothers requested that Jesus grant them the highest places of honor. When the other ten heard this, they became angry with James and John, and ugly competitions among them erupted. According to the gospel of Luke, the disciples argued about "who was greatest?"

A renowned psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan said, human desire is the desire of the other. We want to be loved, desired and recognized by others. In other words, we have “desire to be the object of another’s desire and desire for recognition by another.”<sup>1</sup> In order to achieve the desired recognition, one must risk one’s own life in a struggle for pure prestige.

When the disciples became aware of James and John’s desire to be in first place, they started to desire the same thing and they competed for prestige and power. Where did James and John’s desire come from? It was from the world they had lived in. They knew the social hierarchy of the Roman world and desired to be like these Gentile rulers, who were at the top of the social pyramid. Even though they had become Jesus’ disciples, what they yearned for and what they desired had not changed.

I know many of our church members are retired and are mature enough to be content with what you have. You have stopped rat racing. However, our society is still a rat-race society and many people compare and compete with each other for money, power, status and fame. Let me share a short, animated film. [ppt] What do you think of this movie? It captures quite well the current situation of our lives in a sarcastic way, don’t you think? In a rat-racing society, we tend to replicate the desire of others and compete with others for prestige. However, it has been said, [ppt] “The trouble with being in the rat race is that even if you win, you’re still a rat.”

James, John and the other disciples were called by Jesus Christ, but they were still trapped in the rat-racing world. Like the disciples, we are also influenced by our rat-racing society. The good news is that Jesus leads us to a way out.

### **Self-giving Love and serving others is a way out**

The way out of rat-racing society is not by winning, but by not playing by the rules of competition and winner takes all standards. Jesus offers us a vision of a new world, in which the rule of loving and serving others is the point. Jesus said to his disciples, “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. But it is not so among you; whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.” (vs 42-44)

Jesus came not to be served, but to serve. Jesus came to the world to give his life a ransom for many. Self-giving love is the only way out of the destructive rat-racing prison. Jesus Christ has invited us to this new life. We have heard stories of many Christians who dedicated their lives for others. Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Bishop Desmond Tutu, Abbe Pierre, St. Oscar Romero. The list goes on. Following Jesus Christ, many Christians have not followed the rules of the world but by mutual love and service to the poor and the marginalized, have overcome the rule of domination. “Winner takes all” living is not a Christian way of life. Even a fair competition is not a Christian way of living. Loving one another and serving the weak is the Christian way of living. Sharing what you have is the way of discipleship and salvation.

### **Be a Tin Drummer**

However, the Christian way of living does not seem powerful enough to change the world. The voice for self-giving love seems feeble, compared to the loud drum beat of the world that entices us to power and endless competition, but we need to beat the drum of love, compassion and justice. Rev. Kim said that Christians need to beat our drum countering to the drum beat of the world that forces us to pursue money and fame. Have you read the novel or

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<sup>1</sup> <https://lacan-psychoanalysispraxis.tumblr.com/post/172898020166/mans-desire-is-the-desire-of-the-other>

watched the film “The Tin Drum?” In it, there is a parade scene in which people welcome the arrival of a Nazi commander with a military band? As the commander arrives, in this town the people gather to welcome him with a march played by the military band. Let me share this part of the film. [ppt] Oscar played his tin drum, hiding under the stairs and something remarkable happened. The intimidating march played by the band turned into a joyous waltz. We may often feel that our voice, witnessing the gospel, sounds weak compared to the tumultuous drum beat of the rat-racing world, but the syncopation of the Christian drum beat disrupts and interrupts the unchallenged flow of destructive rhythms in the world. That’s what we are called to do. We don’t have to change the marching band of the consumerist and competitive world. We just need to play our drum so that the sound of our off-beat rhythm may counter that of the world. God uses us and turns the daunting march of this world into the joyful waltz of God’s kin-dom. Stop playing the rat-race game and play the joyful drum of self-giving love. Amen.