

PLACES OF HONOR

INSPIRED BY MARK 10:17-27

Jeff and Seth, twin sons of Beverly, came to their academic advisor first thing Monday morning and said to him, “Professor, we have figured out exactly what we need to jump start our careers after we graduate. So we want you to do what we are about to ask.” Dr. Lee unbuttoned his tweed jacket and sat at his desk. Throughout his 30 years as an advisor to college students, his favorite sessions usually began with the pupil having it all figured out rather than seeking his advice. They came to educate the educator.

Dr. Lee took off his wire-framed glasses and looked up at the eager boys. “What do you wish me to do for you?” Jeff confidently answered him, “Grant a change in the charter that we may be co-presidents of the student government, and that we may serve as your full-time assistants. We wish to attend all public appearances and sit one at your right and the other at your left.” Seth added, “This is to boost our popularity and to build up our resumes.”

The young men were anxious for a quick answer. They were between classes and felt certain Dr. Lee would agree to their plan. He had often complimented their creativity and willingness to get involved in many clubs around campus. They even looked the part — tall, handsome, fit. It was quite difficult to tell these boys apart until Seth dyed his hair blonde. He had finally grown tired of being mistaken for his brother. Funny thing is many people kept forgetting which twin had the new hair color!

Dr. Lee said to them, “You boys do not know what you are asking. Can you keep up with my schedule?” They said to him, “We can! We can even have our meals with you beginning with drinking a cup of coffee together each morning to begin the day!” Dr. Lee instructed the boys to take a seat, and he poured three cups of steaming, hot coffee. Placing the tray of mugs in front of them he asked, “Would you like to drink your coffee straight down immediately, or would you prefer to sip it slowly?”

Jeff grabbed a mug and tried to take a big gulp. “Ow!” he exclaimed. “That is super hot! I burned my tongue!” Seth doubled over in laughter. “You idiot! Can’t you see all that steam? These cups look like mini fire pits! Of course it’s too hot to drink quickly!” Dr. Lee chuckled and said, “I’ll bet your mom had to stop you from doing the same thing when you were young. I can see you as toddlers begging to sit

one on each side of your mother and drink coffee like the grown ups. And when you turned 12, you probably wanted to learn how to drive and get your licenses early.”

Jeff and Seth straightened up in their chairs and threw each other a quick glance. They both had the same thought — how could their professor possibly know all of that? Jeff even wondered if he had been talking with their mother!

Dr. Lee interrupted their runaway train of thought saying, “You may be able to eat and drink the same meals as me, but carrying your course load and club commitments, plus taking on my workload of meetings and social events is quite another matter! Besides the school does not allow co-presidents, and students are not allowed to attend all faculty events. When Seth and his brother heard this they became indignant. They said, “We can handle it all, and if it becomes too much you can just change the schedule. You’re in charge, so everyone has to adhere to your plans. If you say it, others will be forced to comply.”

By this time more students had gathered outside the door and overheard this. Dr. Lee calmly rose and stepped closer to the boys. He leaned on the front of his desk. This was an important piece to convey. The twins felt their faces go flush and their knuckles go white as they clinched the armrests. They were worried they had crossed a line and punishment was about to be flung at them. “You know,” Dr. Lee said. “Sometimes people in positions of power rule over their constituents with an iron fist, acting out authority with superiority, and using words that are harsh and hurtful. But, that isn’t how it is done in these halls. At this university, we use wisdom and love to grow future leaders, not to boost our own selves up. Come with me.”

He led the group of students down the corridor to view the portraits of all the past presidents lining the walls. Dr. Lee continued, “Whoever wishes to be a great leader must have the heart of a servant. We must strive to do great things, not with the goal of ourselves being first, but for the care of helping others be first. Truly great people don’t work to be powerful and revered, but to give their all and dedicate their life for the good of many.”

They paused in front of the last portrait. Dr. Lee’s own image looked back at them. “Rethink your own portrait,” he said. “What will be be your place of honor?”