

We're going to play a little bit of a guessing game this morning. I'm going to give you some facts and you have to see if you can come up with who you think I'm talking about. When you think you know it just raise your hand; I want to see how long it takes the majority of us to figure this out. So here we go. She was born January 19, 1946. She has been nominated for 54 Grammy awards and won 11 of them, including a Lifetime Achievement Award. She has been nominated for 2 Oscars, 1 Tony, and 5 Emmys, having won one Emmy. She has sold more than 100 million albums worldwide. She became a member of the Grand Old Opry in 1969, ten years after her first performance there at the age of 13. She has received a Living Legend Medal and has been a Kennedy Center Honoree. She created the "My People Fund" in 2016 with the goal of giving \$1,000 a month for six months to victims of the Tennessee wildfires. In 1995, she started the Imagination Library in the hopes of spreading literacy and availability of books to kids around the world. Last three quick facts, she is known for the hit song, "Jolene," the movie "9 to 5," and is the founder of Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee.

Talk about a renaissance woman who is in the midst of a bit of a renaissance herself, and has been for the last five years or so. Dolly Parton has become an icon of incalculable description in ways that I don't think

anyone was ever anticipating. There are memes now about how when you grow up you should aim to be like Dolly, and it's kind of astounding really because while her music and film career is the thing of legends, it isn't the stuff people really talk about anymore. When I was little, Dolly almost seemed like a little bit of a joke. She was big-chested, wore outrageous clothes, and had that Southern drawl. She opened a theme park, sang treacly songs with Kenny Rogers, and was on one of my favorite episodes of *Designing Women*. She was a big personality in a tiny body, all bleach blonde and sequins, but now...now she's *Dolly*, the woman who wants to put books in the hands of kids, work with victims of natural disasters, and donate as much as she can to medical research for childhood cancer and Covid. She's a rock star, not only in the literal sense of the term, but also and probably more deeply in the metaphorical sense of it. From a one room cabin to the Rock 'N Roll Hall of Fame. As she sang herself, what a way to make a living.

My thoughts turned to Dolly this week as I turned over a question that got asked in Bible study that was mostly meant rhetorically, but hasn't left my brain. Someone asked, "What does it mean to *be* somebody?" And in my mind, I just kept thinking, we all have very different definitions of what it is to be *somebody*, and then there was Dolly. A *somebody* in every

material success definition of the word. Fame, accolades, glory. But I feel like I can say with almost 100% certainty she would rather be known for being a *somebody* for all the ways she used that fame for good, for philanthropic aims, for trying to leave the world a better place. If Jesus had a phone and memes were a thing back in his day, I think our gospel could have been summed up by him showing James and John the “Be like Dolly” memes and calling it a day.

These disciples, man, they just get me every single time. I want to just put my head in my hands and be like, “GUYS!!! Have you not been paying attention?!” Which I’m sure Jesus also felt pretty deeply too. Jesus and the disciples have been on a steady trek towards Jerusalem at this point, with zero question as to what lies ahead at their destination. Jesus has now told them *three* times that he is going to Jerusalem to face arrest, persecution, and ultimately, death. He hasn’t sugar coated this at all, but been blatantly honest. They have just watched Jesus tell a would be disciple to go and sell all his things because disciples are called to servanthood. He has said ad nauseum the first shall be last and the last shall be first, and yet, here we are, on this dusty road to destiny and James and John just get their messy humanness all over everything.

I would love to have been there for the lead up to this conversation. I imagine the two of them hanging back from the group and bickering like brothers do. “This might be our last chance.” “I’m not going to ask him, *you* ask him.” “It was your idea, you ask him!” “Alright, fine, we’ll both go!” We have no idea who actually speaks, James or John, but their question is clear, in these final days of Jesus’ life, they want to cash in a favor. Jesus simply asks them what they want, and they just put it out there, they want to be seated at his right and left hands in his glory. You have to imagine Jesus just wanting to face palm right there, like, have you guys *not* been listening at all? With a tinge of heartbreak added in because after all this time, here at the end, they still don’t seem to get it.

Jesus has no time to mince words. He tells them flat out that they have no idea what they are asking for. They are so focused on the whole “in your *glory*” part of their question that they have no idea what they’re really desiring. They want to be *somebody*, with the accolades, joy, and good vibes that that comes with. Jesus asks them if they’re able to walk the road he is about to walk, and they just say, oh yeah we can do that, with zero thought to what that means. Jesus tells them, they will in fact follow him, in ways they probably can never anticipate, but that it isn’t up to him who is on his right and on his left, and frankly none of that is the point anyway. He

turns to the rest of the group who are angsty and annoyed with what has just transpired and he reiterates for the zillionth time, this isn't about *you*, this isn't about what you can get out of this, this isn't about being great, this isn't about being *somebody* as the world would dictate. This is about being a *somebody* to someone in need, a somebody that is a servant, one who is willing to give up everything—even their very lives for the sake of others. To be somebody you must give of yourself, not just be interested in the taking, and Jesus fears that message hasn't sunk in yet in these the last days.

It would be so much easier, honestly way more fun, to just sit back and have an incredulous laugh at James and John and the ridiculousness of their request, and yet...again as one of our Bible study folks said, this does nothing but hold up a mirror to our own messy brokenness. We might not be asking Jesus to sit at his right hand and his left, but we certainly aren't immune to the but please love me the most, Jesus thoughts. We compare and contrast ourselves against those around us, and we feel with absolute certainty that Jesus loves us more than *them*. We might not be asking Jesus to let us bask in his glory, but we certainly want to present the biggest, best, most lovely picture to the world, not only in our own lives, but in our church lives. We want our building to be beautiful and adorned and *look* the part of Christ's church, while ignoring the fact that Jesus wandered around in dusty

sandals and probably smelled like fish most of the time. We get concerned about aesthetics and Sunday morning best, and all of those glorious things, and so quickly forget that the Messiah came and said nothing about clothing or how you or your place of worship is supposed to look.

We, like James and John, become so enamored with the ultimate goal that we forget the kind of journey Jesus calls us to, a journey of servanthood and service, a journey focused on how we can be with and for others as opposed to just blindly and blatantly serving ourselves. We want to put the “me” in Messiah and ignore that Jesus was uninterested in self-service or grandeur, but focused solely on teaching others how to walk together and care for one another with servant hearts.

And let’s be honest, even in the way we think about celebrities and people of power and influence reflects this thinking. Yes, we can sit back and say look at Dolly, using her wealth and status for kid, helping kids read, giving back to the communities she came from, but are we doing anything with the opportunities we have in our own neighborhoods for the same type of kids. We’ll tell people, no don’t go downtown, because it’s scary, a blatant code for racism, instead of asking what opportunities are there to work with kids who are at risk, how can we get books in their hands, how can we make the education system serve them and not put them at a

disadvantage. We let opportunities for service and servant work fall by the wayside more often than not because we're busy, because we have too much to do, we have more important places to be, and frankly because we don't think we can make a difference, which is nothing but another way of thinking about ourselves versus those we could be serving. Thinking there's nothing we could possibly do, is a simple excuse to not look within and have an honest conversation with ourselves about where and how we can serve in God's world.

We, like James and John, want the assurance of our place and our status and our glory, but we don't want to hear that none of that is the point. Jesus brought salvation to you, me, and the person we ignore on the corner and there is zero question about that. But there is also zero question that Jesus came to ask us to serve that person, to *see* that person, to use what we have for the betterment of our communities, to not build ourselves up, but to give of ourselves so that everyone has a chance to thrive. Is it hard work? Yes. Is it demanding and will take of your time? Yes. Does that mean you can ignore it? No. These are demands Jesus lays at our feet and on our hearts, how are you going to serve your neighbor today? Are you going to dare, in a world of James and John's, to be bold and brash for the sake of the gospel, are you going to be a Dolly? **AMEN!!!**