

By: Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow

Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow is a retired pastor and serves on the American Baptist Churches of New York State Board of Missions.

It Is Not So Among You!

(Texts: Mark 10:35-45)

How much of our life is spent trying to acquire what we do not have? We hurry through life - competing and acquiring...

It begins the day we are born - this competition, this striving. As our parents begin to track our developmental stages, they discuss these with other people who have children of similar ages and ultimately, we are compared to them. At what "age" do I smile or point or speak? At what age do I walk or ride a bike? When was I potty trained? At what age did I learn to swim? Are these developments considered early, delayed, or right on time? Who makes that determination? The corporate body of mothers or others with whom they are associating.



Then once I get into school it is a race to the top to determine if and how my gifts and talents compare with some other child's gifts and talents. What distinguishes me from the pack? What talents and gifts are worthy and marketable, which are undesirable? Then it's my grades and whether I am better in Math or English; and how do I rank according to my classmates? Am I in the top 20% or the bottom 80%? And what does that say about me if I'm at the bottom? And then there is sports! Am I the quarterback or do I sit on the bench? Am I the pitcher, the catcher or the first baseman, or do they always put me in the outfield? Am I the first to be picked for the team, or the last.

As a result of all of this competition we either feel better than or less than someone else, but we never feel quite good enough!

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As a result of all of this competition we either feel better than or less than someone else, but we never feel quite good enough!

As parents, we do that to our kids. Has it always been that way? I notice in Matthew's Gospel it is the mother of James and John who makes the request to Jesus that her sons be right up there with him when he comes into his glory! (Matthew 20:20) Little does she know what she asks - for when Jesus came into his glory, he was flanked on the right and the left by two thieves. Is that what she had in mind? I think not! Sometimes God does not answer our prayers the way we want him to because he knows the outcome!

I think competition is the root of all evil. It certainly sowed dissension between James and John and the ten other disciples! So, we must ask ourselves, who are we ultimately competing against - each other? Or is the striving and yearning for power a deeper desire to be like God, and ultimately to be God. From the very beginning, Eve ate the apple because the serpent told her that when she did, she would be like God... (Genesis 3:4)

And so through the ages individuals and nations have competed for the power of the universe that only God can claim. We spend billions of dollars trying to conquer the universe, looking for a habitable planet and life out there. Meanwhile, our own Earth suffers from squandered resources, human created global warming, and our people are dying of hunger and malnutrition. We want to begin a new life on Mars when a new life in Christ is waiting for us to claim right here on Earth!

There is no limit to our quest for power, but our questing is turned upside down by Jesus. Jesus says NO..."it is not to be so among you!... 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...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!" (41-44) Wow! And then he delivers the punch line: For the Son of Man came not to BE served but to serve, and the give his life a ransom for many.

And so, as those who follow the Christ, our lives are NOT to be ruled by a lust for power or a desire for control. We are NOT to seek to be above the rest with the most money, the best housing in the best neighborhood, or the most extravagant vacation homes. We are to help others with the resources God has so graciously granted us; and let humility, gratefulness, and service prevail in our hearts and rule our lives.

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