

Dear Friends,

This season is one of my favourite seasons of the year! It's the season of the film awards! Last week it was the BAFTA's, the British film awards, and by the time you read this the season will have probably reached its climax with the Oscars – the American ones. I'm sure they're all worthy contenders for an award. But will the eventual winners match up with what you would have chosen? Who will emerge the winner? The greatest? I've only seen 3 of the films up for best film this year – Roma won best film at the BAFTAs (the first time a Netflix movie has won), but will it also win an Oscar?

It's interesting that these awards are usually made around the start of the Christian season of Lent. A season when we are encouraged to think about our own lives and faith, and how we are following Jesus. Would we be up for any awards? Which ones? How does your faith measure up? What do you need to do to be a better Christian, a more faithful disciple than you are now? And what about our life together as the Church? Are we pressing **'on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called (us) heavenwards in Christ Jesus'**? (See Philippians 3:14)

On the one hand, these are questions of self-examination which are vital for a healthy faith. Rather like going to see the Doctor for a medical check-up or taking our car in for its annual MOT. How are we running? Are we running well? Where is there room for improvement? How close are we to Jesus – close enough to listen to what he is calling us to be?

However, on the other hand, Jesus warns about 'competitions' between us. When the disciples asked Jesus **'Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?'** He replied by placing a child among them and telling them that **'Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes a humble place – becoming like this child – is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.'** (Matthew 18:1-5) And not much later, when the mother of James & John asks Jesus whether her sons can have the places of greatest honour in his kingdom, Jesus reminds them that **'whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'** (See Matthew 20:20-28)

If you've sat through to the very end of a film, enduring all the credits, you will see that the greatness of any film doesn't depend on just one (or even 2 or 3) people. But rather on the skills and talents of a whole host of people – many hundreds. Each of them in a specific role (mostly behind the scenes) without whom the film couldn't be made, or without whom the finished picture would be diminished. The same can be said of the church. The life of the church doesn't depend on (or certainly shouldn't be left to) just one person (or even 2 or 3). The health and vitality of any church depends on every member, every part of the body playing their part. Otherwise our life together and our witness to our communities are diminished.

This Lent, ask God to show you what part you can play in the life of the church in order for the church to be all that God longs for it to be. And your acceptance speech? Don't forget to give all praise and glory and honour and thanks to God – for God alone is the one who makes everything possible.

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