

On June 10, 2009, Colby Curtain passed away. She was 10 years old. A few years before, Colby was diagnosed with a rare form of vascular cancer that prevented her from eating and digesting properly. She, and her family, knew she had only a few years left at most but she faced her illness with a maturity far beyond her years.

Like many of us, Colby loved movies. Sometime around April of that year her family took her to see the movie “Monsters and Aliens.” And although she enjoyed the movie what really caught her attention was the preview for the new Pixar movie “Up.” As soon as she saw the house being lifted up into the sky with balloons she knew she had to see the movie. It was all she talked about.

So when the movie opened in June her mom called the hospice company to ask for a wheelchair so they could take Colby to see “Up.” The wheelchair never arrived. And within five days Colby was so sick she could no longer leave the house, with or without a wheelchair.

So a friend of the family frantically started to make phone calls to grant Colby her dying wish. This friend cold-called Disney and Pixar. She had no connections or influence she just picked up the phone and called.

Pixar has an automated answering system that you can't get past without knowing exactly who you want to talk to. So she guessed at a name and was able to get through to someone who was willing to help. The company arranged to have an employee come to Colby's house with a DVD of the movie. Remember the movie had just opened in theaters.

It wouldn't be available to the general public on DVD for another couple of months. The friend immediately called Colby's mother who in turn asked Colby if she could hang on. Colby said, "I'm ready, but I'm going to wait for the movie."

The next day, June 10, at about 12:30 the Pixar employee came to the Curtis house with the DVD. He also had with him a bag of stuffed animal characters from the movie and a movie poster. He shared some behind-the-scenes, quirky background details about the making of "Up" and then they settled in to watch the movie.

Colby couldn't actually watch the movie. She was in so much pain her eyes were squeezed shut. So her mother described it to her, scene by scene.

When it was over her mother asked her if she enjoyed it and Colby just nodded yes.

The employee left after the movie, taking the DVD with him, and his eyes were welling up with tears.

Colby passed away that evening at about 9:30, with her mother and her estranged father nearby.

They had no idea what the movie was about or how perfectly appropriate it would turn out to be. Among the memorabilia the Pixar employee left was an "adventure book" – a scrapbook used by the main character to document their adventures. Colby's mom, Lisa, said, "I'll just have to fill those in for her."

Now I had to tell you that story in order for you to truly appreciate what happened next. You have to understand how important this was for Colby and her family. The friend who made all this happen was understandably overjoyed at Pixar's generosity and started to tell everyone. Eventually the media got wind of it and started to make phone calls to Pixar for details. Pixar not only declined to comment, they would not even name the employees involved.

Pixar did not do this for attention, free advertising, or even as a gimmick for the marketing department. They did it because it was the right thing to do.

We seem to have a hard time these days believing that a person, or a company will do something good, just because it is the right thing to do. A type of cynicism has crept into our culture, fueled by recent events. We see this frequently in movies. It is no longer enough to have a hero fighting for a just cause. Moviemakers now feel they have to explore the motivation for that character and more often than not that motivation turns out to be selfish.

The truth is, as Jesus teaches us, that true success comes from humble service. This lesson, that Jesus has been teaching us by example, He now teaches with words.

When Jesus and His apostles sit down to relax in Capernaum after a long, hot, dusty walk through Galilee, He knows exactly what they have been talking about, success, glory, greatness.

But when Jesus asks them, they fall silent, too embarrassed to admit the truth. They knew that their preoccupation with worldly success was too self-centered to be worthy of praise.

But Our Lord's response is surprising. He doesn't tell them not to aspire to excel, achieve, and do great things. He doesn't condemn what is a very normal human impulse. Because He knows that achieving things, making a difference in the world, is a basic need felt by every human heart.

This is one of the purposes of our lives: being a sign of God's goodness by making a positive difference in the world.

So Jesus doesn't scold them for wanting to do something great. Instead He tells them what true greatness really is.

The great task for every Christian is not to achieve fame and fortune, popularity, power, or worldly success. The great task of every Christian is the same task that Christ Himself undertook: to serve others, to make others happy, to reach out to those who are weak, and sick, and in need, like little children.

Greatness in the Kingdom of God is equated with humility, an attitude of heart that puts the good of others ahead of our own preferences. It is self-giving. Jesus doesn't say to His apostles "Do not strive to achieve great things." But He does point out where true, lasting, fulfilling greatness lies – in loving one's neighbor, as Christ loved them.

Jesus is the servant-Lord; we, his faithful disciples, are called to follow in those demanding footsteps. We see this throughout scripture and throughout Christian history. We do not act out of selfish motives for our own gratification. We act out of love for God.

In William Shakespeare's Henry V, the English win a stunning victory over the French at the Battle of Agincourt. In response Henry orders his army to sing the hymn "Non Nobis." This is a hymn based on psalm 115, "Non nobis domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam" "Not to us lord, not to us, but to thy name let the glory be given."

It is possible to do something noble, right, and good on the outside, while having selfish motives on the inside. But maturing spiritually means to follow Christ on both the inside and the outside.

On the inside it means to recognize that every single person, starting with ourselves, is valued, esteemed, and appreciated by God. It means actually wanting what is best for every person, regardless of whether or not we happen to get along with them. It means to consider that other people are just as important as we are..

And on the outside it means carrying out Christ-like actions.

We are called to do what is morally right, even when it is difficult or unpopular. We are to be patient and forgiving with people who drive us crazy. We are tasked with finding creative ways to encourage and support those around us.

How do we do this? One way is to do good without seeking rewards. Ronald Reagan once said, "There is no limit to the amount of good you can do if you don't care who gets the credit." Doing what is right and good without looking for recognition is the surest way to purify our hearts of hidden selfishness. It is also the quickest way to deepen our friendship with Christ. We imitate Him who went through Galilee healing the sick and then admonishing them, "don't tell anyone."

This is referred to as having purity of intention. It isn't easy; it is the path of saints. But we are all called to walk it. And we have God's grace to help us along the way.