

Mark 10:35-45
October 21, 2018

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Our gospel passage this morning began at verse 35; however, I believe it is important to the understanding of the passage to hear these verses read alongside the three verses (vv. 32-34) immediately preceding them, which state:

The disciples were confused as Jesus led them toward Jerusalem, and his other followers were afraid. Once again, Jesus took the twelve disciples aside and told them what was going to happen to him. He said: "We are now on our way to Jerusalem where the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the teachers of the Law of Moses. They will sentence him to death and hand him over to foreigners, who will make fun of him and spit on him. They will beat him and kill him. But three days later he will rise to life." (NRSV)

For the third time in Mark's gospel Jesus explains to His disciples what lie ahead as they journey toward Jerusalem. Once again, they have heard the path the One they are following will lead to a drastically different outcome than they could ever anticipate. The road the Son of God is traversing will end not at a palace surrounded with a crown of gold but rather will culminate on a barren hillside, his body hung upon a cross, a crown of thorns upon his head and with two criminals, one on his left and one on his right, hung alongside.

James and John aren't the first to respond in a way that reveals they just aren't quite grasping Jesus and his mission. First, it was Peter rebuking Jesus for

saying such things. Then it was the group arguing about who among them is the greatest. And now, James and John come forward with this request, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask,” which is that Jesus grant them to sit at his right and left hand when he comes into his glory. One can’t argue their spirit. You can almost sense the glee in their voices or perhaps imagine them running to the front of the line to get the question out to Jesus first. We hear later the other disciples were angry with James and John. I wonder why? Our text doesn’t really tell us much; but, I wonder if they weren’t angry that they didn’t get their first. Or perhaps, it is what so often happens when we seek to place ourselves above another. Division results and relationships become strained. It’s sin that causes a rift between our relationship with God and our relationship with one another. What might the church look like if instead of asking, “How will this benefit us or me?” we rather ask, “How will this increase our ability to reach those on the outside?”

I also wonder what the look on James’ and John’s (and the other disciples for that matter) faces would have been if they had stood at the foot of Jesus’ cross. Standing there and seeing not themselves, but two criminals on his left and on his right hung high upon their own crosses. Perhaps, they finally would have grasped just what they were asking Jesus and just what Jesus was offering back to them, when he responds to their question by granting to them a share in his

suffering and shame. This is indeed the cup that he will drink and the cup he will pray for his Father to remove in 14:36, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me.” The way of glory in the kingdom of God goes not through fortune and fame or pride and power but rather through the way of suffering, shame, humility and putting the needs of the other first.

Many, many years ago when I was probably six or seven years old I recall pleading with my parents for a dog. Please, please, please I would repeat again and again. I assured them I would take care of that new puppy. I would feed it. Walk it. Play with it. Pick up after it. It would all be so simple for them. Looking back all these years later, I realize I had no idea exactly what I was asking. All I knew, is I wanted the good things of having a puppy. Someone to cuddle with. A furry friend to play with and who would love me back. I couldn't grasp all the other stuff – trips outdoors in the middle of the night for that puppy to relieve a bladder that must have been about the size of a peanut, cleaning up after accidents in the house, filling up her water again and again, or taking her on walks to tire her out.

Perhaps, that is where James and John are at in our passage this morning. They simply don't understand exactly what it is they are asking. Their questions are inward focused rather than outward focused on the world Jesus has come to redeem through his death and resurrection. Their thinking is still in line with that

of the world and the ruling powers that operate by any means possible to preserve their power, riches, and control. Maintain the status quo.

Jesus doesn't seem all too thrilled with maintaining the status quo. He seldom remains in one spot for any extended duration of time and is constantly on the move encountering new people, taking the presence and love of God to people on the margins of society, eating with sinners, healing the sick, feeding the multitudes, proclaiming the kingdom of God has come near, and calling into question those in positions of power who dare to lead in ways that run counter to this new way of order Jesus lives out. It is Jesus' failure to maintain the status quo and let powers that seek their own interests at the benefit of others that lead Jesus to the cross. And it is God who raises Jesus to new life revealing yet again God's ability to act and bring God's kingdom to fruition even through pain, suffering, and death.

Knowing this and that we are saved not by our own doing but solely out of the unconditional love, mercy, and goodness of God who came to the world in Jesus Christ to redeem it from its brokenness we don't have to ask the same questions those disciples asked last week just prior to today's text, "Who then can inherit eternal life?" And, we don't have to ask Jesus for the privilege to sit on his left or right hand. Those questions have been answered. We are secure and confident knowing we will inherit the richness of eternal salvation.

It is this certainty that moves us from saving and serving ourselves to instead proclaim Christ's salvation to others and serve the needs of our neighbor just as Christ himself did. We, too, must not be content with the status quo but rather continue to be on the move in our calling to follow Jesus. Looking for new opportunities to be transformed by the grace of God, which then transforms us to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. The body of Christ (i.e., the church) is one that is on the move. Willing to go where it is fearful to go. Daring to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ even if others don't care to hear it. Celebrating its past but always looking forward to its future and what new thing God might be doing through it. Taking a risk for the sake of the gospel. As we look to the future as the people of God in Christ Jesus, what are we willing to let go of? What might we risk? How might we move beyond our fears? All for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Proclaiming the good news that Christ loves the world unconditionally.

Amen.