

Mark 10:35-45
October 17, 2021

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

Just prior to our text, verses 32-34, Jesus foretold of his death and resurrection for the third and final time saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again." Just as they did after the second passion prediction, the disciples' response is less than ideal.

It would seem there could be so many other responses to what Jesus continues to tell them such as care and concern for their teacher or a sliver of empathy or curiosity about that whole "he will rise again" thing. Even a bit of gratitude seems appropriate for the time they have been able to spend with him and what he has revealed to them about God and God's kingdom.

Yet, what happens is no less than another illustration of human nature. Perhaps, acting out of fear, uncertainty and the unknown, James and John seek control of their own destiny with no regard for their fellow brethren. They ask Jesus to give them positions of authority as he comes into his glory.

This, in turn, fosters division amongst the ranks. The other ten become angry with James and John. It is exactly as we witnessed following Jesus' second prediction of his death and resurrection as the disciples argued with one another on the way about who was the greatest.

One cannot help but see a reflection in the mirror of the world today. Not that there has not always been division, arguing amongst one another, seeking self-preservation at the expense of another, or the desire to be in positions of authority and able to control decisions and destinies; but things just seemed to be ramped up a bit. It seems we cannot turn on the news without witnessing arguing, finger-pointing, name calling, a complete lack of civility and love for one another at times. And we are kidding ourselves if we turn a blind eye and do not think this is playing out in Christ's church. It has permeated all realms of society and it is a stain on God's good and glorious creation.

Not that disagreements and differences of opinion will not happen or in and of themselves always a negative. At times, differences of opinion can open our mind to new possibilities, see the beautiful diversity of God's masterpiece, or set our sights back on the cross of Christ and the empty tomb of Easter morning, which is what the disciples cannot yet grasp. The cup Jesus is about to drink and the baptism of which he is about to be baptized into, his suffering and death, is the ultimate cure-all for all that ails humanity. That part about "he will rise again" will relinquish control of humanity's desire to secure our own place in the eternal kingdom of God.

Only the redemption offered through the cross of Christ and his resurrection will restore in us the fullest and best versions of ourselves as God created them to be.

Yet, while on earth Jesus' immediate response to the disciples arguing with one another following his second and third passion predictions may give insight into overcoming that which so often grasps hold of us and turns us not only from God and God's will, but also turns us so often from one another. It puts yet another wound on the beautiful body of Christ.

After they are arguing with one another about who the greatest is Jesus states, "Whoever wants to be first must be last and servant of all." Today's text on the heels of the final passion prediction he states, "But whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Notice the common element of those two sets of instruction: service. Setting aside personal want for the sake of another.

Yesterday, at the marriage of Kevin and Kaitlin Clark, I shared a quote from the Apple TV show, *Ted Lasso*, I have been enamored with lately. The title character, a successful American college football coach, moves across the pond to coach a London based football (i.e., soccer) team. One cannot help being drawn to the lovable Coach Lasso who has many a feel-good and much needed quote in the world we find ourselves in. One that stands out is, *"For me, success is not about the wins and losses. It's about helping these young fellas be the best versions of themselves on and off the field."*

The cruciform life of Christ we are united with, in our baptisms, is marked by an outward love of one another that flows from the love Christ first showed us, which may be a recipe of how we, with the help of God, can equip one another to be the best versions of ourselves in our earthly bodies. Seeing one another through the lenses Christ sees us is about seeing the best versions of one another, the image of God as each of us were created to be.

Jesus calls James and John out for their misinformed responses. If we recall, he tells Peter to get behind him and even calls him Satan. Yet, even amidst all this, Jesus continues always to love them to the end. He continues to call them to his side, accept them just as they are, invite them to share a last meal, washes their feet, prays for them, and then will meet them on the other side of the cross and empty tomb. He will never abandon this group he loves so dearly, and he will never abandon his church.

Jesus has secured our salvation. It is out of our hands but what is in our hands through this gift of grace, what grace has freed us for, is to go out and love, encourage, equip and maybe, just maybe, through our service to one another the Holy Spirit is at work making us to be the best versions of ourselves we can be on our time on earth. Precious! Beautiful! Amazing! Loved! Amen.