

Mark 10:35-40

35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." 36 And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" 37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" 39 They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared" (NRSV).

We know from the Gospels that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. Jesus is preparing his disciples with the passion predictions and the Gospels, in turn, prepare us for the passion of Christ. Today's Scripture takes place after the 3rd passion prediction in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus has now told them on three separate occasions that some other people are going to kill him. However, once again the passion prediction is followed by a failure of the disciples to fully understand the true nature of Jesus. Instead of asking for clarification, or inquiring why God would allow the Messiah to suffer and die, they ask for the highest positions in the kingdom. This is a very audacious move. They should be mourning his death and maybe even promising to die along with him, but instead they demand that he grant their request for the top seats of honor.

Jesus takes this opportunity to teach two main principles. One is the position of discipleship. This follows along with what he has been teaching them all along. The first must be last and the greatest is a servant of all. The second principle deals with his position as the Messiah. He, himself is a servant of all and that he must suffer and die. Each time after the passion prediction the disciples fail to understand who Jesus really is and what Jesus is all about. The full implication of Jesus' teaching is that giving of yourself and service is a divine directive that explicitly applies to discipleship. Following Jesus means following completely. Jesus fully gave up worldly desire in order to serve others and disciples are to do the same. The disciples fail to understand three key things. They fail to understand who Jesus really is and what he is really all about. They fail to understand the suffering and death that awaits him. They also fail to understand the lessons that he has taught on greatness and service to others. Despite all of the repeated lessons on discipleship where the first must be last and a servant of all, they continue to think in human terms.

The contemporary lesson for us is always about how the Scripture applies to us in our daily lives. I was once in a group setting and there was negative tension in the environment as the group was reluctant to actively participate in missions. I don't remember the details of what was going on but I remember asking the group, "Why don't we just come to church on Sunday morning?" I was being facetious but no one picked up on it. I was expecting someone to say something to the effect of "Because Jesus teaches otherwise." I looked at the pastor expecting him to seize the opportunity to teach a lesson on the joy of servitude and the joy of giving and how we should all be following Jesus or how it is one of the pillars of discipleship. When you hear a complaint it is an opportunity for you to teach someone about the love and compassion of Jesus. When you stumble upon someone that is reluctant to serve it is an opportunity to teach them the joy of serving in the name of Jesus and following in his footsteps. Serving is an honor

and it is fun. Some of the most cherished moments of my memory are the times that I have spent with others in service. Some of the things that are most cherished in life are the times that we spend with our friends doing good things together.

We learn life lessons from the life of Jesus. The greatest person of all, ever on the face of this earth, offers his whole life - all of himself - in service to people. To be great is to follow Jesus and be a servant to all. Whenever the disciples fail to understand something it brings up a teaching opportunity by Jesus. True greatness is not a position of authority over others. True greatness is being a servant of all. It includes denying the human demand for power, honor, and status.

When I think about the disciples I can see the mistakes that they made but I realize that they weren't bad people. They were human and the mistakes that they made were human mistakes. James and John make a demand of Jesus to give them whatever they ask of him. That is a very selfish request. It is easy for us to criticize them when they make such mistakes because we look at what they did with perfect hindsight. The reality is that we do the same with our selfish prayers. "Lord please give me what I want." Asking for what you want is not surrendering. The problem is that when you focus on what you want, you are not focused on Jesus. Surrendering is a complete change of your life that is based on worldly standards and desires to a new life that is devoted to Jesus, his mission, and his teachings. What do you want? What do you really want? We all want to be next to Jesus in heaven. I want that too but I also want to see you in heaven.