

Mark 10:35-45

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." 41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 42 So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Today is a happy day. We celebrate 120 years of ministry. You are the face of a successful ministry. You are not perfect, never have been, and never will be. I hope I am not the first one to tell you. There will always be ups and downs and the ever consistent pattern of a life cycle with its peak and decline. Your life cycle is decades longer than average. Some churches never get off the ground, some rise fast and die fast, some grow huge and you don't want that. I will explain why telling you a story.

When I was doing an internship with community services in Martinsville, a colleague was drooling over a huge mansion on Realtor.com. She said "Oh, it must be nice." I don't like it when someone says that because it is coveting. I said "You don't want that." She said "Oh, yes I do!" I said "Think about it, you do not want that. You are in human services; you have chosen a lower paying career path because you care about the underprivileged on the fringes of society. To get a house like the one you are looking at is something that you can achieve, if instead of saying 'it must be nice' you plan for it, work hard for it, and sacrifice for it. If that is what you really want, you would have made different life choices. You would have sought a different education, majored in business or finance, not human services. You would have pursued a different career path in life. The ultimate reason you do not want that is because it takes a sacrifice that you are unwilling to make. You would have to sacrifice your character and exchange your ambition from helping others to taking from others. The only way you can have a lot more in life is if there are a lot of others with a lot less. I know you well enough to know that is not who you are. It is the very act of helping those that need help, that brings you happiness in life. Taking from others goes against your caring nature. I am pretty sure you and I have in common the guiding principle of life whereupon we do not sacrifice the well being of others to have more for the self.

Throughout her whole life of growing up in the church no one has ever explained the realism of what Christ taught. People look for a church that meets their wants. I hope by now you can recognize the trap of selfish desire. This has been the problem since the beginning in the Garden of Eden. People look for their own wants to be met and ignore

what God really says to us. In the teachings Jesus, love and compassion are emphasized. At the end Jesus prayed for his church to be united, it is a matter of witnessing this unity of Christian love, the world will know. We go looking for a church that satisfies us instead one that brings to us the realism of what Christ actually taught. So, our religion goes astray and our culture, society, government falls along with it. We end up in a dysfunctional mess because we look for something to satisfy us instead of the realism of what Christ actually teaches. It is our failure to live by the loving nature of Christ that causes us so much trouble in life and throughout history.

I once talked to a man that was looking for church that made him feel good when he left. I said “Yeah, when I joined the church I was looking for Jesus. I want a church that will teach me to live by the Jesus code, not one that will teach their own doctrine as is popular in mainstream society today. When I got the call to ask if I would come here, I did not look at your programs, or attendance numbers, I looked at your per capita outreach. Your outreach is an action that provides circumstantial evidence of where your heart is. It shows your loving care. You have survived past the average life expectancy of a church. You have stayed united in a divided world. You have survived two world wars and you will survive what is coming next if you stay true to the teaching of Jesus. The world will be shocked by what is in the storm clouds on the horizon. You owe your longevity due to being healthy and focusing on what is important to Jesus and not cater to the many different things that can divide us. You know the head of the church is Jesus, not the moderator or the preacher. You know that you are to focus on pleasing God not the people.

In our Scripture reading today, James and John have the gumption to go to Jesus, to ask for something. Actually, they are demanding favoritism. They don't just ask; they insist “Do for us whatever we ask of you.” They do not understand what they are asking of Jesus. They want pride and honor in order to be above the others. The sin is selfish ambition and it is condemned repeatedly in the Bible. They miss the point all together. They haven't thought it through. Jesus points to the us, the Gentiles, and the politics of the world. The rulers lord over the people and the great ones are tyrants. Why on earth can't we get this basic lesson?!

The contemporary lesson is to see yourself in the scriptures. We are a society of James and John. You are to be a servant. Jesus came to serve. We claim to follow in the footsteps of Jesus with selfish ambition and an unwillingness to love. When Jesus is quoted in the scriptures, see it as Jesus is actually talking to you. The pattern of human behavior develops and repeats with amazing consistency because selfish ambition, though condemned in the Bible, goes ignored in contemporary society. Selfish ambition is an unchanging aspect of human nature due to desires of advancement and self preservation of those that have not repented and surrendered their lives to the love of the Lord. Your longevity and success is because your focus is on Jesus not selfish ambition.. Your longevity of success is because we are united together in love, compassion, justice, and unity in a divided world. Your love for the Lord and each other unites us in a long lasting successful ministry.