

Mark 10:35-45

32 They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, ³³saying, "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; ³⁴they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."

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." ³⁶And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" ³⁷And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

³⁸But 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?" ³⁹They 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; ⁴⁰but 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. ⁴²So 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. ⁴³But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

"Seeing with Jesus Eyes"**21st Sunday after Pentecost - October 17, 2021 - Mark 10:35-45/B**

The 10th Chapter of Mark's Gospel is probably the most difficult chapter for our modern ears to hear. Not only are we eavesdropping on some of the disciples' worst days as students, we are putting ourselves into the company of those who just don't get it. We're walking the road with Jesus because we think there is something in it for us, and Jesus patiently and lovingly continues to redirect our well-worn and well-traveled paths. Reminds me of a moment in our family where dad takes son onto his lap to tell him something important, something he really wants to convey to the little one facing him. Seated that way - eyeball to eyeball - the heart to heart begins. And I was amazed at the attention of that little one - drinking in every word being spoken, never once breaking the serious gaze of his father and the words being so carefully chosen to share. And just as the main point was about to be made, the connection was shattered, as the son blurts out, "what's that on your nose, Dad?"

Sometimes what passes as attention to the lesson is a skillfully learned cover. Just ask any teacher! But there are also times when the student is simply not ready to receive what they cannot comprehend. And that is the situation in today's continuation of the stories we have been hearing from the 10th chapter of Mark's Gospel.

When we started this particular section of the journey, the disciples had pretty much seen it all: a storm at sea calmed, a little girl raised from death, a woman cured of a hemorrhage. His teaching was clearly touching their hearts as Jesus sought out those who had nothing but struggle and pain and disease in their lives. Even under the pressure of a growing fissure between him and the religious authorities, they watched and listened as he kept his cool and continued to love and heal and enlighten those who had ears to hear. But now, his teaching was not just aligning itself with the underdogs - it seemed that he intended to upset the apple cart of the fabric of their lives. Jesus was reinterpreting things that had stood firm for generations - speaking with an authority no teacher they had ever

heard - or heard about - had embodied. And the cultural norms that they were so accustomed to, were bending and ready to snap.

Consider what we've heard Jesus teaching: on divorce, he was questioning the interpretation of the law as if it were opposed to God's intention. And suggesting that women and vulnerable children should be received into the community as valued members - only one example of lifting up the lowly.

Then, a man of wealth and position (and therefore community status) comes to receive Jesus' stamp of approval for how faithfully he has kept the commandments - and Jesus loves him enough to challenge him to dig deeper. When the man shocked man walks away grieving because he chooses not to let go of his many possessions, the disciples' confusion began to bubble up. They did not understand - if the one with wealth and status was having difficulty being righteous, how in the world could they, lowly fisherfolk and common workers - ever hope to enter into the Kingdom of God? It was beginning to look like everything they knew, every rule they kept, every basic of their life was starting to disintegrate into dust.

In the little piece of Mark that I included today there is a phrase that reveals the depth of the human heart - the disciples (and, I dare say) ours. Here it is again: (vs 32-34) "They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid." *(Those Greek words more literally mean they were seized with alarm and feared harm or injury, resulting in a lack of courage...)* And then Jesus pulled them aside and shared with them - for the third time - what his future looked like: "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; ³⁴they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again." But they just didn't seem to be able to take one. more. thing. changing.

So it seems rather odd to me, that the first thing they say in response to this unthinkable future is to ask for special privileges - the seats of honor at the right and left of Jesus in his glory? Wow. What have they been looking at? Have they been hearing what Jesus has been saying? But maybe I'm being too hard on them. Maybe James and John (2 of the big 3 apostles) were really just asking to be close to him to the end. For if Jesus died, their notoriety, the public acclamation, the privileges of being the among Jesus inner circle, would be lost. And just as it happens to us, the gifts of a privileged life soon begin to feel like something we have earned. (Think back to the young man who sought Jesus for more affirmation, rather than looking to learn from the Savior.)

Maybe they were not asking for places of power. Maybe they were asking to keep the privilege they already had. Maybe they were afraid of losing their advantage. Their being chosen was a gift, but they were beginning to feel like they had earned it. It seems that is often how it is, and they, we and the rich young man, simply didn't want to give it up.

If you think the Bible is a musty old book and Jesus was a really good man but this religion thing has nothing to say to us today - think again. We're dealing with a similar knee-jerk reaction today. Here's a quick example: The United States has always been a majority white nation of European descent. The Brookings Institute now projects that by the year 2044 that will no longer be the case. There will be more minority populations than

the white population - more brown than white - which has some people standing in line behind James and John, asking Jesus to let them keep their seats of power.

The world order has always been about power and the privilege it provides, like making the rules, and structuring the economy to benefit themselves. Because once advantaged, you have to hang on, or someone might take it away from you and they will do things their way, which might not appeal to you or even include you. It's a frightening idea for those of us who have enjoyed advantage most of our lives. It's a hard concept for those who have worked hard but know deep down that privilege is not a fair wage for that work.

As you ponder these people's lives from 2000 years ago - ask yourself how you might have responded to Jesus then. And then ask yourself how you are responding to Jesus now. For his responses - to whatever anyone is asking him - call us to a personal expense. And the cost of our deepening discipleship is to suffer as God's Chosen people suffered for generations. Even when Jesus speaks of Baptism he is suggesting repentance, a changed life, and a washing away of the sin of *"the heart turned in on itself."*

But, as people often do, James and John saw and heard what they wanted. They were easily distracted and understood "cup" as a cup of joy and "baptism" as a symbol of new life. So, when asked if they were able they said, "We are able." But Jesus then told their future and said, "You will drink the cup that I drink." And they did. James died a violent death as a martyr and John spent his last years in Exile. And who were the ones for whom the places of honor were prepared? In Mark's Gospel, Jesus is crucified between two thieves, "one on his right and one on his left."

So what are we to take away from this? Well, first, Jesus did not condemn the twelve for their questions, nor the rich man for his failure to let go. He did not chastise Peter for pointing out that they had all given up their lives to follow him. And he does not give up on showing us the way to live that heals the culture and lightens the world. He just draws us close to him - looks into our eyes and speaks from his heart to our heart. Sometimes we only see what captures our attention - like the little one who asks, "What's that on your nose, Dad?" But sometimes, if we allow ourselves to trust this One who we can never disappoint, and who will never let us go, then we might just see not only our reflection in his eyes - but the whole world's. Turn your face to the world, people of God. Open your hearts and your minds and live for them. It isn't an easy world to love. But it is the world that God so loves. So, shouldn't we be spending our lives doing the same? Amen.

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Resources: The Rev. Dr. Donald Ray Pratt is pastor of Sebastian United Methodist Church in Sebastian, FL. Day1 10/17/21; The Brookings Institute research, Brookings.edu.com; *"the heart turned in on itself."* Martin Luther's definition of sin.

