

IK Synod Sermon  
10.17.2021  
21 Pentecost  
Pastor Nancy Nyland, DEM

Gospel Reading – Mark 10:35-45

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark, the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter.  
**Glory to you, O Lord.**

<sup>35</sup>James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to Jesus and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” <sup>36</sup>And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” <sup>37</sup>And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” <sup>38</sup>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?” <sup>39</sup>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; <sup>40</sup>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.”

<sup>41</sup>When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. <sup>42</sup>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. <sup>43</sup>But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup>and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup>For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

The Gospel of the Lord.  
**Praise to you, O Christ.**

Grace to you and peace from God, the Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In our Gospel reading today, James and John come to Jesus and ask him an incredibly bold and an incredibly selfish question. Looking after their own interests....first they lay out an expectation.....“Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”

Notice Jesus’ patient response.....“What is it you want me to do for you?”

<sup>37</sup>And then the request, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” <sup>38</sup>But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking.”

While it is true that James and John ask the question, when the other disciples heard about this, they were angry, no doubt because they wish they had thought of this and asked Jesus first. They too wanted what James and John were asking for.

Jesus' response would have been the same to them "You do not know what you are asking."

Just prior to this request for places of honor, Jesus and the disciples were on the road going up to Jerusalem. Jesus takes the twelve aside and begins to tell them what was to happen to him, 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; <sup>34</sup> they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."

This was the third time that Jesus had shared a passion prediction with the disciples. Or as Rolf Jacobsen, professor at Luther Seminary puts it. Three times Jesus has shared his "Interpretations of the Messiah's Servant Mission."

James and John and the other disciples clearly do not understand these interpretations of the Messiah's Servant Mission. They cannot grasp that Jesus will be condemned to death.....that Jesus will be mocked, spat upon, flogged and killed; and after three days Jesus will rise again."

It's easy for us to wonder, why the disciples did not get this. Why didn't they understand? But remember, we understand because we are on the other side of Jesus' death and resurrection. We live in the outcome of the Son of Man, the Messiah, "who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

But Jesus, the Messiah, dying and rising to new life. This was beyond what the disciples' could comprehend. They had a limited understanding and this understanding had been shaped by the culture around them. A culture that expected that the Messiah would be an earthly king, with earthly power and authority.

The possibility of Jesus, the Messiah, being put to death by Jewish authorities....this was beyond their limited views, beyond their limited experiences, beyond their limited imaginations.

We can shake our heads and marvel at the misunderstanding of the disciples, but I wonder if we are much different.

I call it putting God in a box....limiting what God can and will do, in our lives, in the world....boxed in by our own limited views, experiences and imaginations.

As often Jesus does, Jesus turns this whole situation into a teaching moment. Moving the focus from selfishness to selflessness. Moving the disciples and us from the world's definition of honor and greatness to the kingdom's definition of honor and greatness.

"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. <sup>43</sup> But it is not so among you; but whoever

wishes to become great among you must be your servant,<sup>44</sup> and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.”

Jesus once again presents a new paradigm to the disciples and to us:

- power is demonstrated through service
- greatness is shown in vulnerability
- achievements come through compassion
- success is measured not in terms of dollars or possessions but in terms of lives touched
- net worth is measured not in terms of bank accounts but in terms of acts of compassion

Jesus not only teaches servant leadership, Jesus lives as a servant leader. Jesus is a servant Messiah. And to follow a servant Messiah means, well, to be a servant: “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 a ransom for many.”

From young to old, powerful to vulnerable, rich to poor, educated or not — anyone, all of us, can act with kindness, put others first, and try to exercise compassion to those around us. There are opportunities to do these things in our homes, in our churches, in our work places, in our schools, in our volunteering, in our relationships.

As we become servants and slaves of all, the kingdom comes among us and we encounter a God who is much bigger than the boxes we create. A God who is not limited by our understanding, experiences or imaginations.

A God who inspires and empowers us with the Spirit and strengthens us for service. A God who is patient with us, who loves us, who journeys with us and is ever faithful. A God who daily in small ways and big ways brings life out of death. A God who gifts us with faith to follow Jesus, the One who walked the way of the cross instead of the way of the world. Our Savior who gave his life a ransom for many. Amen.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Set free from sin and death and nourished by the word of truth, we join in prayer for all of God’s creation.

Holy One, for the gift of the church handed down through the ages and for all who carry on the servant ministry of Jesus, we praise you. Send your Holy Spirit upon all who are discerning calls to ministry in its many forms and equip them with your gifts. Hear us, O God.

#### **Your mercy is great.**

Creating One, for the lush and abundant habitat you provide for all your creatures, we praise you. We give thanks for farmers who bring in the harvest. Grant safety, alertness and energy for the task. Hear us, O God.

#### **Your mercy is great.**

Suffering One, for all who work toward peace and who lead nations with a servant's heart, we praise you. Bring justice for all who suffer violence, persecution, discrimination, hunger, poverty, and homelessness, and create places of refuge for all people. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Merciful One, for all who do the work of healing in mind, body, and spirit, we praise you. Surround and comfort all who struggle with depression, anxiety, cancer, diabetes, dementia, the coronavirus or any illness (especially), that all may be healed. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Sustaining One, for all who volunteer for the vitality of congregations, we praise you. Strengthen and encourage greeters, ushers, office volunteers, bakers, counters, committee and group leaders, teachers, students, evangelists, singers, builders, nurturers, and all who serve with generous hearts. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Risen One, we thank you for those who have shaped your church and shared your gospel. Through the witness of your saints, continue to inspire us with hope until we all are gathered at your eternal feast. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Confident that you hear us, O God, we boldly place our prayers into your hands; through Jesus Christ, our truth and life.

**Amen.**

**The Lord's Prayer**

Hear us now, Father, as we pray the words that Christ has taught us,  
Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,  
forever and ever. Amen.

**Blessing**

People of God, you are Christ's body,  
Bringing new life to a suffering world.  
The holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.

**Amen.**

**Dismissal**

Go in peace. Serve the Lord. Serve your neighbor.  
Thanks be to God.