

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost October 17, 2021

Mark 10:35-45

With Jesus' third prediction of his betrayal, crucifixion, death, and resurrection fresh in their ears, the brother's James and John come to Jesus to ask a favor. They want the honor of sitting at his right hand and his left in "his glory!"

Now, you could easily knock James and John, along with the other disciples, for arguing over who gets the place of honor. But, as one commentator put it, while the ask of James and John is off the mark, their approach is right. James and John display deep trust in Jesus and the relationship they have with him. Because they approach him with their desire. The desire to be closely identified with Jesus in that moment when his purpose is fulfilled.

Jesus then does what he does, tells them the truth about what their desire will mean- suffering the same fate as Jesus. He also goes on to tell the disciples (again!) what it means to follow him. He admonishes them, you are different from the world, where their leaders act as if those under them are their slaves. Their great ones, Jesus says, are tyrants over them. You are different- you want to follow me and you desire to become great at that? Look not to the tyrants but become servant to others. You want to be in first place, the place of honor? Then be slave to all people. Take the wish that you have and turn it into action that serves others, that has you working to fulfill their needs.

Even Jesus, the very Son of God came not to be served, waited on hand and foot, but to serve and to give his life so others might have life fuller and more

abundant. If this is who Jesus is and what Jesus does, then this should be what we do as his followers.

Since September 12 we have had Jesus telling us both what it means to be messiah (betrayal, beatings, crucifixion, death, resurrection) but also telling us what it means to follow him. To walk where he walks and do what he does. It means taking up your cross, being willing to die to some things. It means caring for those who society deems as worthless and expecting to meet Jesus in them. It means serving others, first. Caring for them, first. Especially those who have no influence and power. The ones we and society have deemed outcast. As one meme based on an old saying goes... when you draw a line, when you build a wall, Jesus is always on the other side of it.

Now, while the disciples don't come off well over the last month or so of our Gospel readings, they do get some of the basic things right. Most important is that even though they don't always understand what he is saying, they recognize that in following Jesus there is life for them that is better than anything or anyone else can offer. So, they stick with him, trailing along behind. More than slightly confuzzled, but willing to keep trying, keep listening to him, trusting Jesus.

Friends, if your desire is for life, true life, then drop the trappings of this world and follow Jesus. Be willing to die to those things that look like success- power over others, wealth – and follow Jesus in service to others, in welcoming those who have no value in the world, in saving the life of the least of these. Be willing to at least consider the notion that when Jesus calls on us to do these things, he means it. Not in some metaphorical sense that makes it easy to do, but in a way that deeply impacts our lives.

Note something else about the disciples. They are not lone figures. They are a group that sticks together no matter what. While the other disciples are angry with James and John they don't kick them out of the group. We don't hear about them being frozen out of meetings or fellowship. No, they seem to be able to heal from this fight rather quickly.

Relationship, between us and God and between ourselves as those created in the image of God, is at the core of what God calls us to. It is codified in the two tables or parts of the Ten Commandments- The first three commandments talk about our relationship with God- Have no other gods, do not make wrongful use of God's name, keep the sabbath- the next seven talk about our relationship with one another- honor your parents, don't murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, or covet what belongs to your neighbor. All of which points to the importance of being in community. We need one another, even when the other guy pisses you off!

I don't think you can really be a follower of Jesus and not be in community- as imperfect and dysfunctional as it can be at times. Because how can we strive to perfect that community if we don't practice being in it? The reign of God is not a one-person kingdom. It is a community of believers.

We need each other for another reason, because no one of us have every gift, skill, and talent. Part of the lesson of community in the reign of God is that we need one another to more fully bring about the reign of God that we pray would come each week in the Lord's Prayer. We need people with musical skills to play instruments that make our hearts soar to the heavens with God, that give voice to the deep joy or grief in our lives. We need people with technical skill to share this

gathering around Word and Sacrament with those who cannot be here or for whom it would be unsafe. We need resources to provide supplies for our Dorcas Circle quilt makers and to help ship those quilts through Lutheran World Relief to people in need. To provide VBS free of charge for the members of our community. We need one another and the unique things we can offer to each other.

Being a follower of Jesus is not an easy thing, but it is a fulfilling one. I cannot think of what it would have been like to have gone through what I have in life without this community of St. John, but also those other assemblies of believers at Zion, Gloria Dei, First, St. Stephen's, Holy Redeemer, Faith and Our Savior's, St. James, St. Mark's and all of those people and colleagues from so many other expressions of the Body of Christ throughout Southeastern Iowa and this United States.

We are not perfect, like James and John we will ask Jesus for things we don't fully understand or that are flat out inappropriate. But we trust in God's grace, mercy and forgiveness expressed to us in Jesus. We trust in the patience of God testified to throughout scripture and made visible in Jesus. And we re-group and try again tomorrow. And tomorrow. And tomorrow. Because, as Peter says in the Gospel of John, Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life.

We have been united together in Christ through the waters of baptism, a claim that does not go away. Our 9th graders will affirm that baptism and the promises their parents made for them on October 31, Reformation Sunday. One of the things I have told them over and over is that Affirmation of Baptism is not a once and done thing but a daily occurrence. Each day we wake up, dip again into the

waters of baptism and strive to follow Jesus. Each day we fall short, sometimes worse than others. But then we try again. And we do so in a community that aids us in our striving, encouraging us, supporting us, loving us, in all our imperfection and in their own.

Our Stewardship Campaign is just one more expression of that affirmation of our calling into community, of the claim God has made upon us. It is a way of following Jesus through commitment of our resources, but also this year through sharing the uniqueness of who we are- with our gifts, skills, and talents. It is not the only way, but it is a way.

Psalm 8:4 asks God, “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you should care for them?” In other words, God, why do you bother?

Yet, God does love us, enough to try through God’s Son Jesus to call us into relationship with God and with one another. For our sake and for the sake of the world. Let us, together, follow Jesus on the Way. And each of us, in our own way with our own gifts, skills, and talents, strive this day to be last of all and servant of all, for the sake of the world and for that same Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.