

Rev. Betsy Welliver Sentigar
Christ Episcopal Church - Towanda, Pa
21st Sunday after Pentecost- Year B- Proper 24
Oct. 17, 2021

Mark 10:35-45

**To the Glory of God
Whose Service is Perfect Freedom**

Donald Meichenbaum, one of American Psychologist's ten most influential psychotherapists, tells of the time that his car was struck by lightning while he was driving. Once he was safe at home, Meichenbaum began to share his ordeal with his teenage son, expecting at least some small degree of sympathy. Instead , his son interrupted, "Dad, let's go buy a lottery ticket. They say the chances of being hit by lightening are like the chanes of winning the lottery."¹

Is it me or does our gospel seem like a broken record? In a jockeying for position for the first two disciples to be called we hear them telling (not asking) Jesus to do for them what "they want"! These two men are feeling such as sense of entitlement that they don't even think to pose this as a question.

Bartlett, David L.; Taylor, Barbara Brown. Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 4: Season after Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ) (Feasting on the Word: Year B volume) (Kindle Locations 6789-6791). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

What are they thinking? Is Jesus their transactional partner? Have they no concern or care for what he is telling them? This third time Jesus is explaining as their demand (not request) gains complete absurdity . It almost reminds me of little children plugging their ears and talking right over the conversation with the mantra” I can’t hear you’!

What is important to recognize here is the two verses (Matthew 33 , 34) which were left out this morning. Immediately before this question the disciples are following him, afraid as Jesus, yet again is telling them specifically how he is to be handed over to the chief priests and scribes. He will be condemned to death after being mocked,spit upon and scourged. This is the third time he has offered a passion prediction. Jesus then is getting more specific and graphic in his description of the tragic journey he is about to make.

He tells them, that that the place of the right and the left is not his to grant but for whom it is prepared. . Not anticipating that Jesus will soon be on the cross, with a criminal on either side, they ask to be seated on his right and left in his coming glory. As Jesus tells them, they literally do not know

what they are asking.² One has to feel a sense of embarrassment for these cherished disciples. Part of our chagrin may have something to do with the fact that we are all in some ways sons of Zebedee.³

However, it is only in facing our own tendencies to be a son (or daughter) of Zededeo that we can come to terms with our humanity and live the new life of discipleship. Henri Nouwen wrote, “Only those who face their wounded condition can be available for healing and so enter a new way of living.” When we are honest with ourselves about our condition, we can begin a journey toward wholeness.

The context of the first gospel of Mark is set around the time of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. War has killed hundreds of thousands in Rome. Tension is ratcheted up so high, that a power overthrow becomes the expectation of these followers of Christ, an expectation of miraculous overturning of the human power structures as they experience them in these times. They are looking for competitive

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Bartlett, David L.; Taylor, Barbara Brown. Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 4: Season after Pentecost 2 (Proper 17-Reign of Christ) (Feasting on the Word: Year B volume) (Kindle Locations 6756-6757). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

³ *Ibid*

edge, a position in the hierarchy in power positions. Humanity's temptation around this is incurable. We see it over and over again in conquest after conquest of societies through history.

Jesus speaks counterintuitively. He is subversive and confusing. His is flipping upside down the orderliness of things. He speaks of becoming a servant in order to be first. To be a servant first requires that one become a slave of all. Life is offered as a ransom for many.

As a slave, you are, in fact, used for another's possession. Your life then is not your own. For us then, does this not point to stewardship. Do you see me ramping up for next weeks sermon? Jesus understood his servanthood. Our baptismal promise directs us as members of Christ's body, the Church to continue in his servanthood.

Stewardship, as a model of servanthood, on behalf of the church is always done on behalf of another. Here, in Christ Church, I am blessed to witness the multitude of gifts offered by so many which compose a loving orchestration. These gifts move beyond us always pointing to God's intention and I will add, inspiration from the Holy Spirit. If we are properly

“in tune “as a community, our gospel , like music lives out its ministry in good works of love and compassion stemming from here. This is our calling, our life’s work which seeks harmony over dissonance, fine tuning over careless maintenance, empowerment over self regard, and accountability over irresponsibility.

I am mesmerized by the beauty and brightness of the restored windows in this church. As the workers left, I wanted to be sure that we were securely buttoned up before my commute home this past Thursday. I took a slow contemplative walk and stopped by the back vestibule entrance. The window there reads” Service for God is freedom”.

Jesus is the model of wholeness, and thus he could come “not to be served but to serve.” When we have “dealt with our issues” (in psychotherapy that phrase is code for “healing” and termination) and overcome the insecurities that drive us to greed and coveting, we, like Jesus, can be in a position to serve at least some of the time and not be served all the time. ⁴ Our continual focus on Jesus creates the healing within, both individually and communally. Friends, let’s stick with it!

⁴ Bartlett, David L.; Taylor, Barbara Brown. Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 4: Season after Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ) (Feasting on the Word: Year B volume) (Kindle Locations 6819-6826). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

Transformation happens through servanthood. Jesus invites us, “Follow me.” Following Jesus in a life of servanthood transforms us unto eternal life. Following Jesus, even in unorthodox ways, can lead toward wholeness. Servanthood is a means to grace.⁵

I will conclude with a prayer for mission as found in the *Book of Common Prayer*, pg. 100:

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of your faithful people is governed and sanctified; Receive our supplications and prayers which we offer before you for all members of your holy Church, that in our vocation and ministry, we may truly and devoutly serve you, through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

⁵ Ibid