

“But What’s In It For Me?” (Mark 10:35-45)

An author tells of a time that his car was struck by lightning while he was driving. When he was safe at home, he started to talk about his experience to his teenage son. He was expecting at least a bit of sympathy.

Instead, his son interrupted him and said, “Dad, Dad, let’s go out and buy a lottery ticket! They say the chances of being struck by lightning are like the chances of winning the lottery.” Everyone seems to be looking for a short-cut to fame and fortune.

There are many things that are fought for in the church today; the type of music that is used during the worship service, the way we use money, the length of our worship service, the way we organize - and we could go on and on. The one thing that usually isn’t fought over is the opportunity to be the servant of all. In our Gospel Lesson for this morning, it appears that James and John, Zebedee’s sons are every bit as self-absorbed as this man’s teenage son when they come to Jesus saying, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

Jesus politely asks, “What do you want me to do for you?”

They respond, “Allow one of us to sit on your right and the other on your left when you enter your glory.”

Their request follows the third time that Jesus predicts that He “will be handed over to the chief priests and the legal experts, when He goes up to Jerusalem. They will condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles. They will ridicule him, spit on him, torture him, and kill him.”

It’s surprising then, that James and John would ask for seats beside Jesus in His coming glory. Had they not been listening?

What is our reaction to James and John’s request? Laughter? Embarrassment? Is it an amazed disbelief that they could make such a request right on the heels of Jesus’ own death prediction?

John Michael Talbot, the hymn writer, said this of Francis of Assisi, “One of the most revealing snapshots of Francis’s approach toward servant leadership is found in one brief sentence in the Legend of Perugia that’s easy to miss amid all the accounts of the saint’s wonderful deeds. But there is hidden, in a description of Francis’s practice of traveling and preaching in churches that, ‘He brought along a broom to clean the churches.’

What is happening in this passage is the same thing that is happening in the church today. We have forgotten why Jesus came. He came to seek and save the Lost. But he also came to **serve** and give His life a ransom for all of us. Jesus has foretold His coming condemnation, humiliation and death, but James and John are still dreaming of power and position.

When we look in the mirror, are we that much different to James and John? We certainly know better than to make the kind of outlandish, insensitive requests like these narcissistic brothers.

But, if we are really honest with ourselves, we might have to admit that there have been times in our lives when **we** have wanted the best seats in the house, the expensive house or car, the promotion at work, or a big accolade for doing something that we should be doing anyway.

We may not be so upfront about it as James and John, but how many of us have spent all kinds of time scheming for privileged positions?

Ambition is a good thing. But when you mix ambition with vanity, you get poison. And one reason why it is poison is because it turns us into monsters who are willing to do just about anything to get our way. And in our trying to rise to the top, a lot of people get hurt. Folks get stepped on, left out, pushed around, passed over, bullied, used and treated like objects, rather than human beings who are created in the image of God.

It's been said that "some people get so caught up in their own agendas that they look at the Trinity for a possible vacancy." We all have "Zebedee's sons in our genes." It's part of our nature. It's part of our broken condition. And into our broken condition, with the poisonous venom of ambition mixed with vanity, comes a big heaping shovel-full of fear...and fear is often in the driver's seat...and what a bad driver fear is!

The death toll is high when fear is at the wheel. Fear causes us to look for security in power and position. Fear breeds prejudice. Fear breeds pre-emptive war. Fear of the future leads to all kinds of efforts on our part to secure ourselves—not unlike James and John, rather than risking the way of the Cross.

Really, James and John's request isn't just comical, it's tragic. It's sad. If you think about it too long and hard, it might even make you cry. Because, again, we are all James and John.

In verse 32 of Chapter 10 we are told that "Jesus and his disciples were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, with Jesus in the lead. The disciples were amazed, while the others following behind were afraid."

Ambition, vanity and fear.....all these things drive us.....all these things seek to destroy our happiness, our humanity...our souls.

And so, coming to terms with our fear, with this poison that keeps us up at night, this poison that keeps us from being the people God created us to be, this poison that keeps us from being who we really are and really can be...coming to terms with this junk, this brokenness, is the only place where we can begin to live a new life of discipleship.

Henri Nouwen, a priest & author wrote, "Only those who face their wounded condition can be available for healing and thus enter a new way of living."

When we are honest with ourselves about our condition, we can begin the journey toward wholeness. And that journey begins and ends with Jesus!!!

In 1 John Chapter 4 we are told that "there is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear expects punishment." Don't we know that "God so loved the world that He gave his Only Begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life"? Remember the rest of the text? "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save it."

Again, the journey to servanthood and wholeness begins with Jesus. In Christ there is no condemnation, no threats, no cause for alarm. In Christ there is no death. In Christ there is only the Love of God, from which nothing can separate us!!!

The journey toward true humanity begins when we put every ounce of our trust in Christ. It begins when we lay all our fear at the Cross of Jesus. It begins when we lay all vanity, need for control, our entire selves, our now and our future, into the loving and strongest of the strong hands of Jesus Christ. Look to Jesus. He's the model of wholeness.

And because of this, Jesus could, indeed, fully and truly, with no hidden agendas, no need for recognition or applause, come to this earth “not to be served, but to serve.”

When we seek to be remade into the image of God, by allowing the Holy Spirit to work and mold us, we begin to overcome the insecurities that drive us, the fear that paralyzes us, the poison that causes us to be greedy, self-absorbed, and mean. When we allow Jesus to remake us, we learn to serve in love, because of love, for the sake of love, and because Jesus has first loved us!

And this is a miracle of God-like proportions! We must serve from generous, grateful, empathetic and loving hearts—not for some accolade or reward. And the more we serve, in the name of Jesus, the more transformation and wholeness takes place in our lives.

For transformation occurs through servanthood, humility, and a willingness to die to self and live with and for Christ. When we serve others in love, we become more like Christ, more like our true selves, more like the image of God into which we were created to be. And a confidence, a boldness is added to our life that no big house, no huge boat or outlandish bank account could ever touch!

After James and John ask Jesus to, “Allow one of us to sit on your right and the other on your left when you enter your glory,” Jesus replied with, “You don’t know what you are asking! Can you drink the cup I drink or receive the baptism I receive?”

“We can,” they answered.

The baptism Christ will receive, is death on the Cross. And sharing the cup of Christ, means to walk the way of the crucified Christ. Again, it is the way to servanthood—ultimate and complete servanthood.

Jesus said, “You will drink the cup I drink and receive the baptism I receive...”

Some have read this as a threat or a warning. They are neither. They are a promise of eternal life. To share in the death and resurrection of Christ—there is no greater hope, no greater privilege.

We don’t have to live in fear; we don’t have to continually seek our own security. We don’t have to step on the heads and hearts of others. Rather, we have Jesus’ promise that we can and will live as faithful disciples as we seek to follow Him. This is a true a miracle!

When the other disciples find out what James and John have asked for, they become angry with them. And this provides Jesus with another opportunity to teach His followers what it truly means to follow Him. What Jesus basically says is: “You know that those who are considered to be the rulers of the world show off their authority, and those with high-ranking and high paying jobs, order everyone around.”

But that’s not the way it is to be with those who call themselves Christians. In the Church, as opposed to the world, the greatest among you are those who serve. The first among you are the humble, the ones who consider other’s needs above their own, and are bold enough in their faith to take on the role of a servant.

Christians don’t push other people around. Christians don’t demand their own way. Christians give their lives for the sake of others.

Jesus said, "If you want to know how to have life, if you want to be whole and complete, take a look at what I have done...how I've lived. I haven't come to be served, but rather to serve, and give my life as a payment for the sins of all who will believe. I have bought you with my blood. Now believe this, and come, follow me."

We are to be the alternative to the abusive, abrasive, in-your-face ways of the world. We are to be set free from that way of life, so that we might become faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, so that we can witness to the only one who can make us whole.

In closing, let us hear these words of Saint Francis of Assisi: "Oh, Divine Master, grant that we may not seek so much to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying, that we are born to eternal life." AMEN