

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost October 20, 2024

Introduction to the themes for the day and season-

Time and again Jesus' followers fall into traps of self-over-confidence only to realize they are in over their heads. Oh I guess it happened to his original disciples too:)

The question to be lived out belongs to us all: *What does God in Jesus liberate us from and for?*

Prayer of the Day

Sovereign God, you turn your greatness into goodness for all the peoples on earth. Shape us into willing servants of your kingdom, and make us desire always and only your will, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

GospelMark 10:35-45 New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

The Request of James and John

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.” **36** And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” **37** And they said to him, “Appoint us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” **38** 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?” **39** 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, **40** but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to appoint, 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. **42** 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. **43** But it is not so among you; instead, whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, **44** and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. **45** For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Sermon

The other ten disciples' beef with James and John was:

- a. Inappropriate succession planning-Jesus is still here
- b. Tone deafness because Jesus had just spoken about his pending death
- c. James and John outflank the others who wanted to make the same request but weren't quick enough.

We don't really know why the other ten apprentices were vexed. But the little red herring I tossed your way might lure us into taking to heart Jesus' teaching moments for those first followers.

For James and John, he simply tells them to be careful what they're asking for. Besides, they will find themselves in over their heads before they know it.

For the other ten, Jesus reminds them of the kind of people and faith community he is liberating them to be. Maybe the world as they knew it functioned through overwhelming wealth, bureaucratic governance and intimidating use of military force. When Jesus speaks of the way of the world being tyrannical with people lording their authority, we don't hear the over the top language he uses—Matt Skinner's expertise in New Testament writings leads him to say this tyranny is extreme; or to use a phrase some of us 1980's mullet and teased up hair-sporting young adults would say—authorities were using force “to the max” to get their way.

Jesus' way is about service. God's liberating way about self-giving and self-emptying. Quantum physicist-turned Anglican priest and theologian John Polkinghorne says God willingly self limits at the earth's creation. Rather than whipping up a flawless ready made cosmos and creation, God builds one that evolves and develops into being and becoming. God's intentional self limiting

gives us insight into Jesus' rejection of wealth, power, or coercion as weapons to wield to achieve his goal of the liberation of humanity and even creation itself.

Conversations from the past week come to mind as I assert that we in the western church haven't totally internalized all of Jesus' ways of liberation. Consider than for more than a thousand years the whole western church patterned itself after the Roman system of emperors, senators and the like. Brace yourself for this next bit-I agree with the critique from US theologian Anna Madsen who says the church conflates mission with the capitalist notions of bigger, better, stronger and faster. Jesus doesn't talk that way when he speaks of serving.

Our new bishop Carla Blakley said to me just this week that now that membership declines and buildings get to expensive to maintain, we are actually becoming more like what the church was for most of its history. Our recollections of buildings teeming with Northern European immigrants and their children and the rapid expansion of programs was the exception...the blip... as the bishop phrases it. We're not the power brokers seated at the head table—we can be where Jesus hung out and where he served—on the margins. That's both exciting and scary!

To echo words from a professor Dr. Madsen and I had in common: "Now that we know death doesn't have the last word, we know we have more to do with our lives than to try to preserve them". Or to paraphrase today's prayer, may the church's greatness be found in it's goodness for the sake of all. amen