

Mark 10:35-45 The Message

James and John, Zebedee’s sons, came up to him. “Teacher, we have something we want you to do for us.”

“What is it? I’ll see what I can do.”

“Arrange it,” they said, “so that we will be awarded the highest places of honor in your glory—one of us at your right, the other at your left.”

Jesus said, “You have no idea what you’re asking. Are you capable of drinking the cup I drink, of being baptized in the baptism I’m about to be plunged into?”

“Sure,” they said. “Why not?”

Jesus said, “Come to think of it, you will drink the cup I drink, and be baptized in my baptism. But as to awarding places of honor, that’s not my business. There are other arrangements for that.”

When the other ten heard of this conversation, they lost their tempers with James and John. Jesus got them together to settle things down. “You’ve observed how godless rulers throw their weight around,” he said, “and when people get a little power how quickly it goes to their heads. It’s not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for many who are held hostage.”

Following Jesus is never easy ... especially when you **don’t know where you’re going** or why you’re going there!

In our scripture reading the disciples are heading to Jerusalem with Jesus. They know Jerusalem is where they’re going. They’ve been there before ... but this time is different, and they **don’t understand what this journey means**. We who have read the rest of the story know what lies ahead, and so does Jesus. The journey to Jerusalem is a journey to the cross and to death.

James and John are among the closest people to Jesus. James and John, along with

Peter, are the three that Jesus takes to the top of the mountain when he is transfigured. And perhaps that is partly why they make the request they do ... *Lord, grant us to sit on your right and on your left when you come into your glory!* Because they saw his glory on top of the mountain. They didn't understand that either, but they believed it when Jesus became dazzling white and they heard God's voice saying, "This is my son, my beloved." They've tasted the glory, and they want in. They want more.

James and John are also clearly ambitious. They want to get ahead and they aren't afraid to ask. People like that can be a little annoying, but we also admire that quality in people. They are go-getters. We reward and encourage go-getters for good reason. We all need that quality. If you want to get a job it takes effort, gumption to keep applying for jobs. We've all learned that you have to advocate for yourself in the current health care system or you might not get the care you need. Did not Jesus himself say "Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you?" So that's what James and John are doing. And side note — those disciples who are annoyed at them? They're annoyed because they're jealous and afraid that James and John are going to get a better deal!

Jesus doesn't dump on them for asking. It's just that he can't grant it, because it's totally not what going to Jerusalem is about. It's not about fulfilling their hopes and dreams. It's not even about fulfilling Jesus' hopes and dreams —it's just the opposite. Following Jesus to Jerusalem is not going to lead to glory.

At this point in the story Jesus has tried to explain at least three times to the disciples that he will be arrested and killed, but it's not sinking in. I like what one commentator said: "*In this cycle of passion predictions the inner three have been singled out for their denseness (Mark 8:32; 9:38; 10:35), but in this passage all the Twelve are implicated.*"¹

Why haven't they caught on to what Jesus is telling them? Maybe that's part of that natural human protective response that doesn't want to see or hear what you don't want to see or hear. Certainly, they don't want it to be true, so they live in a

1. Lamar Williamson, *Mark*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: J. Knox Press, 1983), 192.

bubble of denial. We pretend we're turtles (like Franklin the Turtle) and just withdraw so we don't have to face reality. Facing reality is hard. Then you have decisions to make.

Maybe it's a good thing they didn't get it. If they did, they might have stopped following right then and there ... or perhaps they would have **kidnapped Jesus** and forced Jesus to go their way instead of his way until they could shake some sense into him. Because Jesus' way wasn't making any sense.

It seems to me that a lot of the time today people would rather kidnap Jesus and make him follow them than follow Jesus where he is going.

I'm not sure if you are aware or not, but there's an election happening south of the border — 16 days left to find out who will be the next President of the U.S! One of the things that is so disheartening is seeing the rise of Christian nationalism and the blending of a certain flavour of Christianity with politics. It is truly mind-blowing that people who identify themselves primarily as Christian would support someone whose values and policies are so clearly *not* Christian. That there are people out there who support policies that Donald Trump espouses does not surprise me — but that they would resonate and be championed by Christians does. It is mind boggling because so many of the policies lifted up by Donald Trump and whole heartedly supported by Christian nationalists don't look anything like Jesus! It is primarily white evangelical Christians who are in this camp, but not entirely. Some charismatics, like Pentecostals, are also in this camp, and some Catholics.

Christian nationalists have a 'me-and-my-country' focus. *Me first!* Looking at the U.S. you know some of the policies Trump is supporting are strongly anti-immigration and anti-refugee or asylum seeker. We'll protect ourselves with guns, with tariffs, with walls. There's a glorifying of the U.S. of the 50's and a desire to return there. Of course, they conveniently forget that the U.S. of the 50's was only good for some Americans — white, straight, male.

Christian nationalism wraps the cross of Jesus in an American flag, and in this way declares that they are God's chosen ones. They are those who take a seat next to Jesus on the right and the left. Actually, I think it places themselves in the middle and Jesus to the side. The glory is for themselves and for those who look like them

and hold the same values they do.

Just in case you start to think “thank God we’re not like them!” Canada’s history indicates otherwise. The churches and the government were strongly allied to make this country Christian, white and civilized. The cross was wrapped in a colonial world view that led to residential schools and abuse.

Jesus was on the road to Jerusalem to the seat of power for his nation, but he was not on the road to victory — not in any human expression of victory. He totally could have if that’s what he wanted. He had crowds around him who were fed up with being taxed to death by the Romans. But you don’t catch him wearing a MIGA hat: *Make Israel Great Again!* Neither is he out to protect his little gang, his tribe of 12 disciples. He prepares them, but he does not spare them from the suffering and trials ahead. Leading them into a rough situation, he doesn’t promise them glory. Jesus is not even looking out for number #1. Jesus, their teacher, their Lord, was heading right into the heart of the storm, towards his own arrest, torture and death. The two who will end up on his right and on his left are not disciples but criminals, dying on a cross.

The call of the disciples is not to glory but to *follow*. And they do. As imperfect as these disciples are, they follow. You know, no Christian church has it right. Be leery of any church that thinks it does. You are not a perfect follower, and neither am I. The important thing is that we follow; that we are willing to make course corrections, to change our opinions. The most important thing is a humble spirit.

Here and in several other instances Jesus explains that following, being a disciple, means serving, not glory.

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” I like how it is translated in the Message “That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for many who are held hostage.” Mark 10:45

There are real hostages in the world, and I pray to God that all are released, but we are all hostages in one way or another. I’m a hostage to fear. Most of us are. What’s this world coming to? What will it be like for my children? What will it be like in 16

days?

There is so much reason to fear: your declining health and energy, your dollars which aren't stretching to the end of the month — let alone paying off the debt; your roommate or your boss or some other relationship that is toxic, and you feel like you can't get out. You have your own concerns and worries.

Jesus led those disciples to Jerusalem because he loved them and so that he could set them free. I don't fully understand the mystery of the cross, but I know that what was intended for evil became transformed into pure love as he walked willingly towards it — not keeping his eyes on himself but keeping his eyes on his Abba, his heavenly parent and keeping his eyes on those he loved: James, John, Peter, his disciples, the other followers ... those who never did follow and on you too.

From the beginning of his ministry right to the end Jesus is about the work of serving and setting people free. Wouldn't you love to be set free? From fear, from self-loathing, from addiction, from loneliness? You fill in the blank. ... Pray with me "Lord you came to set the captives free, and I am one of them. Forgive me. Set me free."

Jesus makes it clear that if you decide to follow, that will be your work too.

Remember the story after the resurrection from John's gospel where Jesus says to Peter, "Do you love me?" Three times he asks that question and each time that Peter says, "Yes, I love you." Jesus responds, "Then feed my sheep". Following means being willing to lay down our false self and seeing others. Truly seeing the other and loving is connected to serving and to feeding. We dare to emerge from our protective turtle shell and see the pain of the world. Hand in hand with our God who calls us out, we do things that make a difference.

You know, it really does work. If you surrender your life to God and start walking, God will show how you are called to serve, and somehow your own fears get smaller, your own love and faith expand. No matter what happens, we have the faith that we are not alone on this broken road.

Today is World Food Day Sunday. I'm grateful for the Outreach and Social Action Committee for bringing that to our attention. Today we are encouraged to make a special donation that will go to support Loaves and Fishes, a low-cost restaurant in town.

Food is partly how we serve here at Wall Street. We want not only to deepen and support our own food ministry, but also to want to look beyond ourselves to see the need of real people in our community and in the world. As we do so, the Spirit of Jesus, the bread of Life, fills us on our road to heaven.

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