



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

THE REVEREND CANON RICHARD C. WEYLS
CANON FOR COMMUNITY LIFE & SENIOR ASSOCIATE RECTOR
THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, OCTOBER 20, 2024
ISAIAH 53:4-12; PSALM 91:9-16; HEBREWS 5:1-10; MARK 10:35-45

WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?

Mark 10:35-45 [*James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." 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?" 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; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 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. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."]*

We had been in Europe for three weeks, so we were quite eager to reconnect with some of our grandchildren. Last Saturday I got us some tickets to see *Cat Kid Comic Club: The Musical* at Seattle Children's Theater. We picked up Dominic (age 12) and his sister, Ariel (age 8) at their home while daughter-

in-law, Marianne, brought Layla (age 4) on the light rail and monorail.

Dominic and Ariel were sweet to us but they were super grumpy with each other. It was a long car ride from Kirkland to Seattle Center that morning as they bickered and fought. "Ariel is kicking me! No, I'm not!

Dominic keeps looking at me and I told him to stop it! Can't she just stop breathing? It's bothering me!" Much of the journey was spent intervening and redirecting. It was a lot of work.

We were relieved to finally get to our destination and unite with Marianne and Layla. We were all seated in the same row at the theater. But then we needed to sort out the seating arrangements. Mark and I quickly grabbed seats in the middle with an open seat between us. We thought this would allow each of the three grandchildren to sit by one of us. Big mistake! The fighting began for the middle seat between us. Dominic and Ariel quickly calculated that this person would get to sit by both of their grandfathers at the same time. It was the prized seat. Ariel pushed by her brother to claim the seat "Oww, Ariel pushed me and stepped on my foot on purpose!" Dominic screamed. "I did not! Dominic was blocking the way so I couldn't get by," Ariel yelled. Dominic pleaded, "Nonno, tell Ariel to give me that seat." (The kids call us "Nonno," the Italian word for grandfather, even though neither of us is Italian). Now, 4-year-old Layla was just watching this play out, looking rather dumbfounded. The solution came from my husband who was a

special education teacher for 40 years. "I don't like the way you are talking to each other, and you don't get to make demands of us about this seat. Layla gets to sit there because she's the smallest. That's how things work in our family. Now, choose your seat."

It seems that sibling rivalry is as old as humanity and that vying for a preferred seat is even seen among Jesus' closest disciples.

From today's Gospel, brothers James and John ask, "teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." Astonishingly, Jesus responds to this presumptuous demand with patience and curiosity: "What is it you want me to do?" They said, "Grant us to sit one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

"Glory" isn't a word we use much nowadays. It's a churchy word we hear in sermons or hymns. But we know what James and John are asking for: prestige, fame, kudos, praise, distinction, success, honor, renown. They want pride of place. In short, the Sons of Thunder want unique, intimate access to Jesus' power and glory. In fact, they don't simply *want* these things; they're convinced that they deserve them. That they're *entitled* to them.

Jesus rarely responds well to people's sense of entitlement. They say, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." In other words: "We're entitled to something here, Jesus. We're willing to wait patiently, but you'll need to give us our due in the end. After all, we've sacrificed a lot to be your disciples. What's in it for us?"

In return, Jesus asks the question he always asks: "What is it you want me to do for you?" Not, "Here's what I want," or "Here's what I'm entitled to," but rather, "I am here to serve. *How can I serve you?*"

What James and John fail to understand is that service in the kingdom of God is not a second-class means to a first-class end. Service **is** the end. Service is power. Service is glory. "Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first must be slave of all." The only path to success in Jesus' kingdom economy is through the surrendering of our most cherished forms of entitlement. Sure, go ahead and aspire to glory! But recognize that glory by Jesus' definition is not an accretion of privilege. It's not upward mobility. Glory in God's kingdom is an exercise in subtraction. It's a movement downwards. It's the generous and perpetual expending of

oneself in love. Once again, "glory," in the economy of salvation, is the continual expending of oneself in love.

In a few short weeks, we will enter the sacred season of Advent. As Church, we will be invited to contemplate a vulnerable God who enters humanity as a helpless infant, a God who flees his home as a refugee to escape the murderous threats of an insecure king. A God whose greatest displays of power include riding on a donkey (not a horse – a sign of privilege), washing dirty feet, hanging on a cross, and frying fish on a beach for his traumatized friends. How exactly have we gone from this God of *kenosis* — the God who empties himself of all privilege, the God who perpetually pours himself out and surrenders his own life for his loved ones — to God an untouchable Iron Man?

I wonder if the fantasies of earth-shattering power and glory we impose on God are just that — our own lustful and sinful fantasies. Maybe such a God is easier for us — more familiar, more palatable, more impressive. We like a God who is a bigger and more powerful version of us. This God is comfortable and doesn't challenge us. Why bother getting involved in the work of justice and affected by the horror and sorrow of the world when

God can wave a magic wand and fix everything for us? Why lean into our own creativity, why call each other out to engage in the slow, difficult work of renewing creation, when “glory” is about grabbing the fanciest seats in Jesus’ throne room? Why contemplate a Jesus who glories in pouring himself out and serving his guests — refilling their water glasses, warming up their leftovers, preparing their rooms, washing their feet — when we can contemplate a cozy combination of Superman and Santa Claus instead?

Our Gospel today leaves us with two questions. Two choices. James and John seek glory by privileging themselves: “Do for *us*. Grant *us*.” Jesus epitomizes glory by privileging others: “What can I do *for you*? What can I do for *you*?” Dare we trade one question for the other? Dare we surrender privilege for glory? Discipleship is about subtraction, not addition. The invitation is to mature in a downward direction — to serve, serve, and serve some more. And when we’re done with that, ask again, “God, what can I do for you?” What can I do for you?



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