

PENTECOST 22

MARK 10:35-45

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

36 “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

37 They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

38 “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

39 “We can,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. 42 Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

In today’s Gospel Lesson our Lord Jesus deals with the ambitions of two disciples—James and John. They wanted the two highest positions in the Kingdom. They had ambitions of glory and privilege, of power and of being served.

Jesus teaches that his **Kingdom values are just the opposite: greatness is serving**. So if they have ambitions in his Kingdom, they need to BE AMBITIOUS TO SERVE.

“Let one of us sit on your right and the other at your left in your glory,” is what they ask. (V. 37)

Who do they think they are? It appears that their mother Salome and Jesus’ mother Mary were sisters. So Salome was Jesus’ aunt and James and John his cousins. They likely had known each other all their lives. Furthermore, James, John and Peter formed the inner circle of disciples. All of this may have played a role. But their **MAIN MOTIVATION** was human pride and the sinful ambition to be served. Their vision of the kingdom was one of glory: *“Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”*

Before we judge them too harshly, let’s admit that we probably would have desired and maybe done the same thing. We want God to give us success, easy lives, good health, money, admiration of others, etc.. We are tempted to complain that God has let us down when he leads us through painful times. We want glory now, not in heaven.

Ironically, if you look at Mark 10 you will find that just before James and John came with their request Jesus had said: *“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, 34 who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”*

So how does he deal with their request?

First, he tells them they don’t know what they are asking: (V. 38-40) “Drink the cup I drink” is a Jewish expression that meant to share someone’s fate. In the OT the cup of wine was a metaphor for God’s wrath against human sin and rebellion. The reference to baptism is also a metaphor about the suffering he would undergo. The disciples were blissfully ignorant and claimed they were ready for anything. Jesus said they would share in both because the world would also turn on them. He also told them that the places they requested were not his to assign. This was something his Father had done already. This is the first patient and loving way the Lord deals with this out of line request.

Second, he again teaches about the different value structure in the Kingdom as compared to that of human nature. He speaks of the Gentiles, those who don’t know the way of God. (V. 42-45) In the value structure of human nature and of the world greatness is measured by being served. The more you have serving you the greater you are. Jesus characterizes how those in authority use their positions to lord it over others, that is, exploit others for their own advantage. James and John had ambitions of being high officials so they could enjoy the worldly privileges of power.

Jesus doesn't condemn ambition but gives it sanctified purpose. He is the most ambitious of all—goal driven—determined—worked through all obstacles toward success. Result: He endured the crucifixion and provided us with salvation.

In his Kingdom there is a **new vision of greatness and human interaction**: Serving.
BE AMBITIOUS TO SERVE.

Do we realize what a revolutionary blessing this is?

The way of human nature and the world is to trample everyone to get our own way, but in the world as God created it and as it is being restored in the Kingdom everyone's purpose is to serve. Every role or vocation, no matter how high or low, is a serving role. The higher the position, the greater the obligation to serve.

In St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians he writes about how this serving attitude applies to various human relationships. But he begins with a general exhortation: *Submit to one another out of reverence to Christ.* (5:21) In the thinking of the world submitting means inferiority but in the Kingdom it is a supreme value with positive connotations.

Paul tells how this serving and submitting works out in marriage. For a perfect husband Paul chooses Christ, the bridegroom of the Church. Husbands are instructed to love their wives as Christ loved the church and **gave himself up for her**. (Talk about serving!) The husband is the head of his wife and family. Headship is a role of authority. But it is not an authority to be used as leverage over others. Rather it is a role of self-sacrifice in service of wife and family. When a wife has a husband who acts like Christ, she is not afraid to submit as the Church does to Christ. Instead of an ongoing struggle for rights and control, both husband and wife serve the other and reap the reward of security and happiness.

In closing, there are three things I want to repeat and emphasize:

1. Be sure to see the great contrast between the ambition of sinful human nature and the holy ambition of Christ and the ideal he set forth for his Kingdom.
2. Appreciate what a great blessing this ideal is in our lives and what a gift it is for the world. It is the difference between a dog-eat-dog world where everyone is scheming and fighting to get to the top so they can have advantage over others and a world where we approach human relationships as opportunities to serve without calculating what is in it for us. Instead, we follow Christ who came to serve.
3. But most of all treasure the fact that "*...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" Think about all the prideful ambitions you have had and still have. Think about all the failures in family relationships because you thought of yourself rather than your spouse or a child, all the human relationship failures, guilty memories and on and on. I wish I could go back in my life and undo all those things like you can undo something on a computer. Well we can't, but our Lord Jesus gave his life a RANSOM. The word translated *ransom* is used to describe *the price paid to free a slave or the price to make amends for wrongs*. **Jesus chose that word so we would be assured that he, the Son of God and our brother in human flesh, paid the price to make amends for our sins and to set us free from the condemnation we deserve.**

We can't be the perfect person we wish to be, but we must believe that the blood of Jesus cleanses away our failures from our record in the court of God's judgment.

It is this serving Savior who tells us: BE AMBITIOUS TO SERVE.