



*Intrigue*

*Mark 10:35-45*

*Sunday, October 21st, 2018*

*First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois*

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Secrecy. Conspiracy. Duplicity. Envy. Jealousy. Anger. No, this is not a description of a television drama series like “The Crown”, “Game of Thrones” or “This Is Us”. This is a description of today’s gospel lesson.

Two of the disciples, James and John--the sons of Zebedee--came to Jesus asking for what is essentially a blank check, not unlike our children coming to us and asking if we’d do them a favor without first stating what the favor is. As we might expect, Jesus was suspicious..

“What is it you want?” he asked. “When you enter into your glory--your Kingdom,” they replied, “let one of us sit at your right hand and the other at your left.” It was a pretty gutsy request, and it was a secret deal that left the other disciples out.

“Do you think that you can drink the cup that I will drink and be baptized with the baptism that I will be baptized?” “Oh yes; we are able.” Little did they know, really know.

The gospel writer does not tell us how Jesus looked at them. We do not know if he paused and inwardly smile at their naiveté. I imagine that he did, but who knows? Eventually he said to them, though, “The cup that I drink, you will drink, and 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 give for it has been prepared for others.” I love that response, in part, because it keeps us grounded.

Several years ago I met a couple to prepare for their upcoming marriage. Both were “Cat children”, raised in Caterpillar homes. One had moved quite frequently. The other was more stable. When I asked about lifetime goals one said that their goal was to be the CEO and President of Caterpillar, Inc. (This was before the move to Deerfield.) I was momentarily taken aback.

But then I thought of something that Norman Vincent Peale once said, “Shoot for the moon, even if you miss you’ll land among the stars.”

I reminded the couple that there is only one company president and CEO in a generation. Strive toward your dream but in pursuit of it remember what is important.

Years ago I sat in the living room talking to a wife and her daughter about the funeral of their husband. I always ask, “Tell me what pops into your mind when you think of ‘So and So’”. Usually this produces a flood of happy memories. But in this case it just produced an uncomfortable silence. Finally the wife said, “I know that you have to say nice things about ‘Bob’ (not real name) because he was a public figure in the community. But he wasn’t much of a husband or a father.” Ouch. How’s that for a legacy?! Many people find material success but are left with empty lives.

The Rolling Stones once sang “you can’t always get what you want, but you get what you need.” Contrary to our mother’s admonition, no matter how hard you work, no matter how hard you try, some things will not be yours because they are intended for someone else. And, the truth of the matter is, that your mother may have lied to you--not intentionally, of course. You may have been her little genius but she was biased, biased with maternal love. You probably aren’t not the “world’s little genius”, nor are you the smartest person in the room.

In life we have wins and losses, successes and failures. If we think that we are the “smartest person in the room” and wonder why others don’t recognize our genius”, maybe it’s because we aren’t “the smartest person in the room”.

I once read that the most difficult instrument to play in an orchestra is “second fiddle”, second chair. It is my understanding that second, third, fourth or any other chair is not supposed to take the lead, play louder than the first chair. Our role is to add depth and color. We may not get “the glory” but that’s okay because we are supposed to get the glory for “Thine is the glory and the power for ever”.

Jesus’ response to James and John also has a theological element to it. The place where Jesus entered “glory” was the Cross. The left and right hand were the places reserved for the two criminals.. And the Cup is not the cup of Salvation but the cup of Suffering. Remember what Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.”

Couple this with the fact that Jesus’ baptism is a baptism into death. As the apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a deathlike his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (Romans 6: 3-5)

Followers of Christ must be willing to suffer and die for his sake. Or, as Jesus himself once said, “If we wish to save our life we will lose it, but if we lose our life for his sake and the gospel’s we will ultimately save it.”

When the others heard what James and John had asked Jesus we are told that they became angry. So Jesus called a “huddle” or a staff meeting. “Listen”, he said, “don’t let the world define ‘greatness’ for you. This is God’s definition of ‘greatness’; the Kingdom’s definition of ‘greatness’”;

If you wish to become great, you must be willing to serve. You must be willing to do the lowest of jobs, if called upon to do so.

Brother Lawrence, the 17th century former soldier, Carmelite monk and saint of the Church shared a treasury of truths in his conversations and writings that eventually became a little book entitled, The Practice of the Presence of God. He said such things as:

“We ought not to be weary of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed.”

“Let us think often that our only business in this life is to please God. Perhaps all besides is but folly and vanity. ”

“Do not be discouraged by the resistance you will encounter from your human nature; you must go against your human inclinations. Often, in the beginning, you will think that you are wasting time, but you must go on, be determined and persevere in it until death, despite all the difficulties.”

“The difficulties of life do not have to be unbearable. It is the way we look at them - through faith or unbelief - that makes them seem so. We must be convinced that our Father is full of love for us and that He only permits trials to come our way for our own good.”

So, here is your “memory verse” for the week. “Whoever wishes to be the greatest among you, must first be the servant of each one of you.”

To God be the glory. Amen.