

“TO SERVE NOT TO BE SERVED”

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I do not know about any of you, but there are times when I read scripture, I feel challenged to fully understand what it means and so I must do some digging to find understanding. This week I went back a few verses to see what might have been left out to find understanding for this week's lesson. In the gospel of Mark which we have been looking at over the past year, many times we witnessed the disciples also having that same problem. They had a problem understanding what Jesus is saying to them as they head toward Jerusalem. They just cannot believe that he really meant what he had just said to them that he: ***“will be handed over to the chief priest and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.”*** (Mark 10: 33b-34) Yes, even though this is the third time Jesus has told them what is going to happen to him, they still do not believe, because they only understand human ways and not God's ways.

When James and John asked Jesus to do for them whatever they ask of him, I believe they were thinking in the ways of the world. They wanted to sit at the right- and left-hand side of Jesus because his power would rub off on them, after all in the world, that is how it works. So, I guess you can say that James and John are still hoping that what Jesus was telling them was to happen would not, and that he would sit on the throne that had been left empty since David, and that the Romans would no longer rule over them. Wasn't that what the Messiah was to be and to do for the Jews?

Yes, it had to be very confusing for James and John, since they have been with Jesus for almost three years at this point. They had witnessed so many things that he had done for others... feeding over five thousand with five barley loaves and two fish, he had healed people, he had driven out demons, preached to great crowds of people, he had sent them out along with his other disciples after having given them the power to heal. They had also witnessed him being transformed and seen him talking with Moses and Elijah? They had to feel that Jesus *could* stop this nonsense of being put on trial, beaten, and killed, and this utter nonsense of being raised after three days...that just could not happen...it must not happen.

We are much like James and John though, we want events to happen and go a certain way...our way. We understand how people come to power, how they become rich or famous or the best in whatever they do. We also know that for many of those people they come to feel entitled, privileged, and that they should be treated differently from those who do not have the same standing in society that they have. They believe that they are to be served, not to serve, especially those they would deem below their standing. These people also seem to have an entourage who follow them and there are always the few who want to be top dog and be on the right or left so the prestige rubs off on them as well. That is how the world works, but Jesus says that is not how it should work.

Jesus showed not only the disciples, but even those who gathered around him how to treat one another. How to work with one another; how to care for one another. He never forced anyone to follow him. On more than one occasion there were some that turned away, and he even asked his twelve disciples if they wanted to leave him, they could. Even though they did not leave him,

they still had their doubts, their questions, and their humanness that wanted him to conform to the ways of the world.

Martin Luther talked about how we are to be a part of the world, while being apart from the world. Not always an easy path to follow. You might say that could be our living out daily our baptism, drowning the Old Adam in us daily. Luther was also to have said that God does not need our good works, but your neighbor does. One could say we are called to serve not to be served.

When James and John asked Jesus to give them whatever they asked of him, his final answer was whoever was on his right and left was not for him to grant. As Jesus hung on the cross there were two thieves on either side of him. One who berated and mocked him, the other who acknowledged not only his innocence, but confessed who he knew Jesus to be as he asked him to remember him when he came into his kingdom. Jesus' answer was, *today you will be in paradise with me*. Have you ever wondered if the other thief was there in paradise as well? If we think about his saying to James and John, it was not for him to grant who was at his right or left side, but it was for whom it has been prepared. That goes into the realm of "*With God anything is possible*." I believe he very well might have been, but it not for us to judge but only God.

We come to this place, or places like it, as people who question, who do not understand, and yet we come and continue to come. Why? Is it to have a place at the right or left hand of Jesus? I do not believe we come for that reason, but to hear about the possibilities of hope that comes through Jesus. The possibilities of discovering how we can live differently from the expectations of the world. How, we can look around us daily and find even small ways to serve, not because we have to, but as I said last week, how we get to. Yes, you and I get to serve our neighbor over, and over, and over again whoever and wherever they might be. Amen.