

Small-Group Bible Study for Oct. 15-21, 2018

Memory verse:

“But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else.”

--Mark 10:43-44

1. **Read Mark 10:35-45.** What is your reaction to the request of James and John?
2. What do you suppose they were thinking? Was there a misunderstanding here?
3. How does Jesus respond?
4. Do you think James and John truly understood what was to happen to Jesus? If not, how might they have interpreted his questions? *
5. What is their response? What does it mean to be “able”?
6. The *Life Application Study Bible* says: “It is easy to say we will endure anything for Christ, and yet most of us complain about the most minor problems. We may say that we are willing to suffer for Christ, but are we willing to suffer the minor irritations that sometimes come with serving others?” What is your response?
7. Jesus then predicts that the two disciples will indeed suffer. What happened to them (see Acts 12:2 and Rev. 1:9)?
8. Who will sit on the left and the right of Jesus? **
9. In what do James and John think greatness lies? ***What does Jesus tell all the disciples?
10. Are we called to drink from Jesus’ cup? If so, how? ****

Prayer:

Dear Lord, please inspire us through the Holy Spirit to ask, not “How can I be great?” but “How can I serve?” In Jesus’ holy name. AMEN.

From the commentators:

Mark G. Vitalis Hoffman, Glatfelter Professor of Biblical Studies, United Lutheran Seminary Gettysburg, PA:

[Three times in Mark, Jesus predicts his suffering, death and resurrection—the third time is the two verses preceding this week’s Gospel lesson.]

*... “[I]t is James and John who follow Jesus’ pronouncement with a request that shows how little they have learned. Instead of acknowledging Jesus’ anticipation of suffering and death, they imagine a triumphant, regal scene with themselves sitting in positions of honor and

power at King Jesus' right and left. It is not a matter of leaping to an expectation of the glory of the post-resurrection Jesus. ...They simply have not heard Jesus at all—or refused to hear the dire news—even though he has repeated the prediction three times.

“Jesus replies, doubtless with considerable exasperation, that they don't have a clue what they are asking for. Can they drink the same 'cup' of suffering and death he must drink, a cup that he himself will later ask be removed if possible? (14:36) Can they be baptized with the same baptism Jesus is to endure? (Beyond a metaphorical symbol for suffering, Jesus' reference to a 'baptism' is unclear. Perhaps Mark's audience would understand it in the same way that Paul talks about being baptized into Christ Jesus' death in Romans 6:3f.) Still clueless, James and John affirm that they can, but, surprisingly, Jesus says that they will. (By the time that Mark is written, James will have been killed by Herod Agrippa I in 44 C.E. for his role as a leader in the Jerusalem church. The fate of John is uncertain, though traditionally it was reported that he lived into old age in Ephesus.) Nonetheless, positions of honor are not Jesus' to give. James and John may have been thinking of something along the lines of being with Jesus in glory like Moses and Elijah were at the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8), but in Mark, the only ones to be at Jesus' left and right will be the bandits crucified with him when he is 'enthroned' as “The King of the Jews.”**

“Once again, Jesus tries to redefine what it means to be first and great. In 9:35 and 10:31, Jesus had said that to be first required being last and servant of all. In 9:36-37 and 10:13-16, he had demonstrated what this looks like in God's dominion as he welcomed children. Here in 10:43-44 he repeats the concept. To be great is to be a servant. That certainly challenges normal expectations, but even in antiquity, there was appreciation for rulers who provided public service. Jesus pushes matters to an extreme, however, when he goes on to say that to be first is to be a slave of all. Slaves were at the bottom of the social ladder, and there was no honor or reward in working for others as a slave.”

David Lose, senior pastor, Mount Olivet Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minn.:

... “Jesus says once more – in verses just before those appointed – that he is going to Jerusalem to die. And, again, the disciples don't get it. First, James and John ask for special places of honor and then the rest of the disciples resent their self-interested pushiness. Jesus' words still haven't sunk in and taken hold yet, so he says as plainly and clearly as possible that to be great is to serve others and that to be first is to be last. And then comes [the] healing of a blind man, Bartimaeus.

*** “It's interesting, isn't it, how the healings of blindness bracket Jesus' three pronouncements of his impending death, the disciples' failure to understand, and Jesus ongoing teaching about what constitutes greatness? I think Mark tells the story this way because he knows that Jesus' words – indeed, his whole life! – run contrary to our natural tendency to think about power, leadership, and all of life according to the terms of the world and therefore take time to sink in. In today's reading, for instance, James and John think greatness comes from status and power. And in response Jesus points out that there is no escaping service. You will either willingly, even joyfully, serve others, or you will become a slave to your illusions that you can be free and secure your future through status and power (or, in our day, wealth or youth or fame or possessions, and so on.).

... “Perhaps that’s also how we might hear Jesus’ description of his life as giving himself ‘as a ransom for many’ – not as Jesus buying us back ... but instead as paying himself out in order to rescue us from our delusion that we are somehow self-sufficient, independent, self-made men and women. From this point, his whole life – including his self-sacrificing death – challenges not only our assumptions but the very powers that be with the surprising and life-giving revelation that as we lose ourselves in service we find ourselves living more fully than ever before.”

Pastor Thomas Beam, Hope Lutheran Church, Smethport, Penn.:

“Within the text, we find that Jesus’ cousins disregarded our Lord’s third prediction [that he would suffer and die], and maneuvered to gain priority...in the kingdom. The foolish quest of James and John to be positioned on the right and the left, as advisers in the coming kingdom we see as couched in self-seeking ambition. This is first attested to by this text [when] the remaining disciples objected to the blatant approach. However, the protest of these other ten disciples was likely made out of their own jealousies, arguing over the two men who were using their familial position as a springboard to high office.

“That the early church also later believed the request to be unseemly is clearly evidenced when we compare gospel texts. Likely written some fifteen years later than Mark, the gospel witness of Matthew deflected the blame for the two men’s foolishness by including the character of Salome in the telling. Salome was the mother of the two men. In Matt. 20:20-28, we read that Salome, being rather a motherly power broker... is described as asking the question concerning political hierarchy. Thus, the church of Matthew seemed to soften the ambitions of the two men... who were by then recognized as apostles and highly regarded as martyrs. Similarly, in later discourse, we also see that the Lukan gospel side-stepped the whole issue entirely by omitting the scene in its telling of the gospel message.

“We clearly see that our Lord does not rebuke his cousins, but asks whether they are willing to do what is necessary to obtain the privileges. He queried whether the two men were able to drink of his cup.

“Jesus also asked if they were willing to suffer death by drowning in baptism. Here we clearly see that Jesus used the word, ‘baptism’ as describing ‘immersion unto death’. The two men rashly said that they were able. Most authorities agree that this was a statement of foolish bravado. I tend to agree. Because of their foolish response, however, Jesus informed them that they would share the cup and baptisms, but the positions were not his to award. The stations had been laid aside by God for others. I dare offer that the scene portrayed here by our Lord could be that of his crucifixion, wherein two guilty persons were crucified alongside his own innocence.

“The scene ... therefore, culminates with our Lord stating clearly that life in the kingdom turns the world’s value system on its head. For his followers, those who wish to be lifted to glory as his disciples, are to accept baptism and the lowliness of servitude. The servitude prescribed, however, take us to the extreme by our Lord’s use of the word ‘ransom’. Even as defined in modern terms, to pay ransom carries the connotations of kidnapping. However, here it means the willing substitution of due payment by the child of God. The term forms for us the theology of vicarious atonement... that Jesus made payment... he took our punishment upon himself! Convicted of death for our transgressions, Jesus made payment to God for our

salvation. ...We thus are made at peace with God not by our own deeds, but by the willing acceptance of death on the cross by Jesus Christ. All we need to do is accept the gracious, free substitution... rather than scheming to climb the ladder for worldly position in either church or state.

“Once we have accepted the gift, however, we then are called to live as persons empowered within the community of the church. ... we thus experience the Resurrection! We become participating citizens in the kingdom of heaven.

“Jesus had taught then, and yet teaches now through the power of the Holy Spirit... that we are called to also work as a ransom. The Spirit comes to us in baptism and continues to mold us so that we may walk together forward in the world through Christ Jesus our Lord. The church is therefore called to spend ourselves... to serve, and not to be served. We are to give of our lives in ransom fashion for the salvation of others!”

Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, editor, Lutheran Forum, Saint Paul, Minn.:

...“[T]he cross is *heterobaptism*— it is a *passion* that one must undergo, not an *action* that one chooses to undertake. The distinguishing feature of baptism in Mark (and in Christianity) is precisely that it is not performed upon oneself, although one may approach it willingly, as Jesus does. James and John misunderstand the glory that they are pursuing actively, for Jesus’ ‘baptism’ is not a matter of action but of passion. Their boastful assurance ‘we are able!’ earns a response from Jesus whose irony can only be grasped by those who read to the end of the story: you bet you’re going to undergo this baptism, but it doesn’t mean what you think it means.

“This passion, this cross, ...then sheds light on what it means to be a leader who serves not by lording but by submitting. It even illuminates, to a degree, what it is to be a ‘ransom’— there is a marked element of helplessness in being the trading token or sacrificial lamb.

“Really, James and John had no idea what they were getting themselves into.”

Mark: A Devotional Commentary, Leo Zanchettin, general editor:

****“In our own ways, each of us is called to drink from Jesus’ cup. Who among us does not face opportunities every day to lay down our lives for others? Who does not sense the call the draw closer to the Lord by giving up our lives—even in the smallest of ways—for our friends? By our willingness to serve, we can reflect the life and love of Jesus, the humblest of servants.”