

Save Us Some Seats!
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Scripture: Mark 10:35-45/ Ord 29B
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³⁵James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”

³⁶And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?”

³⁷And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”

³⁸But 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?”

³⁹They 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;

⁴⁰but 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.”

⁴¹When the ten heard this; they began to be angry with James and John. ⁴²So 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.

⁴³But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,

⁴⁴and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

⁴⁵For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Proclamation of the WORD

Zebedee’s boys, the disciples James and John, bother me! They sound so pushy and arrogant, wanting the best seats for themselves in Jesus’ glory. I can relate to the other 10 disciples who get annoyed, too. After all they have all been following Jesus and serving in his ranks, why should James and John be first in line for the best seats? Jesus’ new Kingdom is coming, and they want to sit to the right and left. They want to be in the cabinet, staying close to the seat

of power. The fact that Zebedee is mentioned as their father is important. He must have had a recognizable name...maybe he was a prominent fisherman. Maybe James and John were used to being at all the right places and running in the right circles. Maybe they were hoping that Dad's reputation might help them get the top positions. Whatever it is, I get annoyed that they have the gumption to ask for the best spots.

Did you notice how they ask Jesus? Sometimes my children will try to entrap me with a question.

"Mom, when I ask this question, promise me you will say 'Yes.'" Even though, they have not told me what they want. The question might be, "Can I have a new iPod touch?" or "Can I have a sleepover on Friday?" I am wise to their ways.

C. Clifton Black points out the sad and sorry way James and John ask their request ("we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you"). That's loaded! It echoes King Herod's "rash" words to Herodias in chapter six ("Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it"). You remember Herodias wished for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. And she got what she wanted.

The Zebedee brothers are easy to be annoyed with as long as we recognize our own inclinations for the same desire for position. We might be disappointed in their strategic plan for Jesus and their big picture for his ministry. Their religious imagination, it seems, has failed them. They're going with the same old categories and assumptions that they've always had, and just inserting themselves into the places of prestige and power.¹

But, let's think about this some more. What if they are asking for the best seats because they have complete trust and confidence in what Jesus is saying will come true.

What if they know exactly what they are getting into???

We did not read in the Scripture lesson today what happens right before their request. Listen to....

Mark 10:32-34

³²**They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him,**

³³**saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles;**

¹ See Clifton Black. *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 4.* (Louisville: John Knox, 2009), 193.

³⁴ **they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.”**

Jesus just predicts this horrible road ahead. This is the third prediction of the Passion so surely the disciples get it by now. Jesus is about to face an excruciating death. In fact, they will make sport of him, spit on him, and crucify him as a criminal. And guess what Jesus says about the disciples. He says, “we are going up to Jerusalem” where these things are going to take place. We are going...including James and John. That is scary stuff. In fact, the scripture says the same.

they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid

Who knows how you and I would react, but I bet I would be scared to death to hear this prediction, too. And hearing, “WE all are going to Jerusalem so this would take place,” would put me over the edge.

After the Session meeting Thursday, Chuck and I watched a movie in order to unwind. Well, be careful what you choose to watch in order to ease into sleep. We watched *The Knowing*- a thriller with references to prophecies of Ezekial and the end of the world. Actor Nicolas Cage is the father who faces the reality the death of those he loves. He faces losing his own life, too. I would not recommend it before falling off to sleep. In the night Chuck dreamed of struggling not to drown, and I woke up thinking of driving a boat and having a boating accident which hurt a child. Hmmm...

Water reminds us of the threat of death, doesn't it? Water can be dangerous. It is interesting that we use water to baptize.

Jesus tells the Zebedee brothers, you must be prepared to drink the cup that I will drink and be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. The waters of Baptism remind us that in life and death we belong to God. Being baptized in Christ is following him, and he ends up giving his life. It is hard for us to realize the danger of Baptism, for it is a profound and special event for us...a happy occasion. But it is a hard choice for others.

Will Willimon while dean of Duke Chapel was a part of a baptism. The Campus Minister approached him to hold the baptism of a Chinese grad student. Willimon was pleased and even brought his camera on that Sunday. The man and his family were there. Awkwardly Willimon had them pose for a photo following the service. The family seemed strangely unhappy. The Campus Minister told Willimon that he was so embarrassed. He told Willimon that this man was taking a huge risk by professing Christ. That photo could not be shared. If his parents found out, they would likely disown him. If the Government found out, the man would likely lose his scholarship to study in the US.² Baptism

² See Will Willimon, *Good News?* (Day1 <http://day1.org/>)

can be dangerous. Jesus says you will be baptized with the same baptism of which I am.

In the same way the reference to the cup is to the Last Supper which will take place. The Last Supper was actually the celebration of the Passover meal that Jews marked to remember the Lamb of God who was given in order to protect the children of Israel in Egypt. Remember the blood of the lamb was brushed over the lintel of the door to act as a shield from the angel of death on the last night before they left Egypt. The meat of the lamb nourished the people for the hard journey ahead. Jesus' words are loaded with meaning. This lamb prepares the way for the children of Israel to cross the waters of the Red Sea into their freedom.

Jesus is about to let loose of his life when the tendency for us is to hold on to dear life. Maybe the brothers Zebedee understand more than I originally thought. They believe Jesus and are sticking close to him. Isn't that what we do when we are facing the worst and, at the same time, hoping for the best?

Maybe you have found yourself in that situation one time or another...Sticking close, holding onto each other because we will have to trust and let go...and trust in the promise of Jesus' words.

Fred Craddock, the famous preacher and teacher, tells about the desire to hold onto life at any cost.

You don't just turn loose of life. Life is a very tenacious thing and will not give itself up easily. First time I ever realized that was while chopping cotton on a farm. I don't know if you know what chopping cotton is, but you're chopping everything but cotton. You're chopping weeds and all. But there was a snake, which I killed, but then I had to keep chopping the snake, calling my father and saying, I've killed the snake, but it won't quit wiggling."

He said, "Well, son, a snake won't die until sundown." I didn't know that. He said, "You hang it on a fence," so I picked it up with a hoe and put it over the fence. Every once in a while I'd look over at the fence, and there was just the tail of that snake moving just like that, until sundown. I learned for the first time that it's hard to give up life, just turn it loose.

And Jesus said, "I'm going to turn it loose." But it was not a decision that was determined by his friends- they tried to oppose it- and it was not a decision determined by his enemies. He looked at them with a level gaze and said, "You're not taking my life; I'm giving my life." He was free.³

Jesus chooses to give his life, like a Passover lamb whose blood is a shield of protection. He was free to avoid it, but he chose to give it. Jesus is not like terrorists this week in Pakistan who strapped bombs to themselves and chose to die destroying the lives of so many through their own death.

³ Fred Craddock, *Craddock Stories* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), 46.

They end their life out of fear.
Jesus gives his life out of love- in order to conquer death and bring life everlasting.

Jesus tells how his Lordship is different from those leaders of the day. Jesus explains to the disciples that the rulers are like tyrants lording it over people eliciting fear and submission. Jesus says but my kingdom is one where people are free to serve others.

I saw a servant a couple of weeks ago sitting in a chair giving his blood so others can live.

I saw a servant the other day, walking in the CROP walk, joining so many who desire drinking water, food and the essentials of life.

I saw a servant the other day. She was leading her Presbyterian Women's Circle, providing hospitality and making a place so women could study Scripture together, pray for one another, and serve others.

I saw a servant the other day. He was poking pansies in the cool, wet dirt around this church.

I saw a servant the other day. She was feeding a family who was dealing with an illness.

By choosing to follow Jesus we are free.
Free from being a slave to fear.
Free to serve.

Maybe I underestimated the Zebedee brothers, James and John. Maybe they knew exactly what they were asking Jesus for. Maybe they knew that the power of serving and self-giving love is the **only** thing that can transform the world, and they want to be right in the thick of things. They want to see God's power at work in the world up close. They want the best seats in the house.

Mark 10:43-45

⁴³**But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,**

⁴⁴**and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.**

⁴⁵**For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."**

Jesus gave his life to set us free!

All who trust in him and are willing to serve will have a reserved seat. And that is good news!

Thanks be to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, AMEN.