

**St. Andrew’s Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 10:35-45

***“A Hard Favor”***

In today’s Gospel – we get to see two of Jesus’ inner circle, James and John, brothers - the Sons of Zebedee, also known as the Sons of Thunder. In our lesson on Wednesday night – we got to see the first of season two of the Chosen, which was simply called “Thunder” which was about James and John and their boldness. They were concerned about their place in Jesus’ coming kingdom – and as members of Jesus’ ‘inner circle’ they probably felt it was ok to request of where these two sons of Zebedee would sit. They went to Jesus, and I want you to listen to how bold they were - as they started by saying, *“we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”* That is just good old chutzpah! That is a very hard favor to ask. Can you just imagine your child or grandchild saying to you, “I want it!”, “get it for me!” That is what these two men were doing. These apostles understood the power – but not the cost. Jesus asked them what they wanted, as if He did not know, and so they replied, *“Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”* That is a little presumptive – don’t you think? There were 12 apostles, but they were in the inner circle. Right? Jesus had already promised “thrones” but they may have misconstrued the meaning when He said that the twelve apostles would *“sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”* (Matthew 19:28) Kings would often place people at their right and left hands and were seen as the most powerful people in all of the kingdom. James and John wanted to sit right beside the Messiah in His glory, the most honored places in His kingdom. Jesus had promised all of the apostles that He would have a kingdom, and James and John saw Jesus glorified in a way that no one else had ever seen Him at the Transfiguration when He glowed a bright white, right alongside Moses and Elijah: Moses – the law, and Elijah – the Prophets – with the fulfillment of both, Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth - right between them. People of the day would say – what good could possibly come from Nazareth. Peter was also an eyewitness of that event and Jesus told the three of them not to tell anyone – and they obeyed. James and John approached Jesus with this question - as loyal subjects to their King. It must have been burning in them, wanting to make sure that they were solidified in the Kingdom to come.

It would not be until after Jesus’ death and Resurrection and the day of Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit, that they fully understood that Jesus’ kingdom was not of this world. They finally realized that it was not centered around palaces and earthly thrones, but in the hearts and lives of those who believe in Jesus. James and John asked Jesus to give them special positions in His kingdom – because, after all - they were in “the inner circle.” It is natural for people to want to do well – rewarded with honors and promotions. You know, it is always good to get a pat on the head – as well as a bump in the paycheck, but it can be a problem if they lose sight of God’s specific will. God may have different work in mind — it may not be as glamorous - but surely it is just as important.

Jesus answered, *“You don’t know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”* “We can” (Mark 10:38-39) they answered.

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Jesus’ response to James and John, is that in making such a self-centered request, they had no idea what they were asking. Asking for positions of highest honor meant also asking for deep suffering. One goes with the other. Jesus had been teaching them all along about glory through suffering, but as I said before, the disciples really didn’t understand it yet. Jesus asked these two apostles if they were *able to drink the cup* that He would drink. The original Greek indicates that this is an event that hasn’t happened yet but is so absolutely certain to happen that it can be spoken of as already having happened. It is amazing! The “cup” to which Jesus referred is the same “cup” that He would ask His Father to let pass by Him in His prayer in Garden of Gethsemane, on the Mount of Olives, as He was about to be arrested. It is the cup of suffering that He would have to drink in order to bring salvation to each and every one of us – to sinners. Along with it, He would endure horrible physical pain, and He would also bear the wrath of God’s punishment for sin.

I want to draw you back to our first reading from the Prophet Isaiah 53:10-12. Isaiah foretold about the Messiah that He would be the “Suffering servant.” Listen to the last part of verse 12: *“because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”* God the Father gave us through His Son, Jesus, the precious, free gift of salvation, with no strings attached, just three nails, paid for by Christ, but being a follower of Jesus isn’t painless or easy. Our everyday lives test our commitment to Jesus Christ and even our loved ones will face their own challenges in following Him. We need to be encouraging one another, holding each other up when we fall down. Celebrating the great things that happen in our lives. I talked about two marvelous arrivals in the Tanner family and in the Evans-Ferrer family. Great arrivals! I also talked about the celebration of life that will take place on Thursday at 4 o’clock at Sims Chapel of Linda McKee. We need to be there for one another – to let each other know that you matter in each of our lives. IT is funny, Jama Kirkland, one of Linda’s best friends, asked me if it was possible for a certain song to be played. I told her that if it were in church – no, but since it is Sims Chapel – you can go ahead and play “We Are Family” by Sister Sledge. We indeed are all family, connected, not just by the Body of Christ but by our relationships with one another.

Jesus told them, *“You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 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.”* James and John said they were willing to “*drink the cup*,” to face any trial for Christ. As a matter of fact, each of these two apostles of Jesus would drink from the cup, but in different ways: James died as a martyr, as Herod ordered for him to be put to death by the sword, in Acts 12:2. John lived through many years of persecution, including surviving being boiled in hot oil, walking out unscathed, but then being forced to live in exile on the island of Patmos, where he received from Jesus the Revelation of Jesus – the Book of Revelation. It is thought that he died of old age in Ephesus. Although Jesus knew that these two disciples would face great suffering, this still did not mean that He would grant their request for great honor. Suffering is the price of greatness, but it is also the price required to

follow Jesus. They would follow and they would suffer, but that alone would not allow them to sit at His right- and left-hand side in the kingdom of God.

As Jesus said, He would not make that decision - those places of honor were reserved for, as He said, *“those for whom they have been prepared.”* That was done by God the Father! By Jesus saying that God already knew who would gain those places of great honor, He revealed to us a part of the character of God – that He knows all things! Jesus’ was saying that eternal rewards will be distributed according to the Father’s decisions, revealing that He is under the authority of the Father, who alone makes the decisions about leadership in heaven. These rewards are not granted as favors, but they are reserved for those whom God selects. Just as we cannot earn heaven, we cannot earn our place there.

I find it ironic that these two Sons of Zebedee - the ‘Sons of Thunder’ – faithfully asked to be on either side of Jesus, but would see two other people take the place to the right and the left of our Lord Jesus Christ, not in His kingdom – but on the cross at Calvary. Matthew 27:38 tells us that *“two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.”* Sinners – and Jesus came to save sinners. One mocked and ridiculed Him, but the other asked that he be remembered by Jesus in His kingdom. Jesus told him – *“truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*

Jesus didn’t mock James and John for asking, but He did deny their request – for He knew what was best for them. Instead He lovingly guided them back to focus on serving with humility. *“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. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 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.”* (Mark 10:42-45) He paid our bill – the one we are still ringing up and asking for forgiveness. Have you ever ‘paid it forward?’ When we were in seminary we got up to a toll booth in Pennsylvania, we were told that the car in front of us paid our bill – paid the toll. So with that we decided that we were going to pay for the next 2 cars. Have you ever had that happen to you? Whenever we get off the track that we have been called to take – Jesus reminds us to hear His words – and we always need to put Him first – that He put us first as He gave of Himself – His very life for us.

From all of this we can learn that we can feel free to ask God for anything, Jesus told us that! His answer may not be yes, it may not be no, it may not be right now – but His answer definitely will be what is best for us. That is truly the love of God!