

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

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 10:35-45

**“What’s Best for Us”**

In today’s Gospel – we see a vision of Jesus’ most trusted apostles, two of His inner circle, James and John, brothers called the Sons of Zebedee, also known as the Sons of Thunder, – and they ask Jesus about their place in His coming kingdom. As very close followers of Jesus, and members of the ‘inner circle’ they may have felt a right to make the request of where these two sons of Zebedee would sit, they asked Jesus, *“Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”* Jesus had already promised “thrones” (although the disciples may have misconstrued the meaning) when He said that the twelve disciples would *“sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”* (Matthew 19:28) In the royal courts of those times, those chosen to sit at the right and left hands of the king were the most powerful people in all of the kingdom. James and John wanted to sit right beside Jesus Christ in His glory—the most honored places in the kingdom. Jesus had taught them, and all of the apostles -

- that He would indeed have a kingdom;
- they learned because James and John saw Jesus glorified in a way that no one else had ever seen Him at the Transfiguration when He glowed – whiter than white, right alongside Moses and Elijah. Moses – the law, and Elijah – the Prophets – with the fulfillment of both right between them – Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth. Peter was there and Jesus told them not to tell anyone – and they obeyed.
- They approached Jesus with this question - as loyal subjects to their king.

It was not until after Jesus’ death and Resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, that they fully understood that Jesus’ kingdom was not of this world. It was not centered around palaces and earthly thrones, but in the hearts and lives of those who believe in Him. James and John asked Jesus to give them special positions in His kingdom – after all they were in “the inner circle.” It is very natural for people to want to do well – rewarded with honors and promotions, (it is always good to get a pat on the head – and 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. Jesus’ response to James and John, is that in making such a self-centered request, they did not know what it was that they were asking. Asking for positions of highest honor meant also to ask for deep suffering. There was no way they could have one without the other. That is hard for us to understand.

Jesus had been teaching them all along about glory through suffering, but the disciples still did not get it; they really didn’t understand it yet. Jesus asked if they were *able to drink the cup* that He would drink. The 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. The “cup”

Twenty-Second Sunday After Pentecost, October 21, 2018, Liturgical Year “B”

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, on the night that He was arrested. It is the cup of suffering that He would have to drink in order to bring salvation to you and me – to sinners. Along with it, He would:

- endure horrible physical pain,
- and He would also bear the wrath of God’s punishment for sin, causing Him to be abandoned by the Father for just a brief time.

I often think about the movie – “The Passion of the Christ” and how when Jesus gave up His spirit – the image of a huge teardrop fell from heaven. Here God the Father was saddened by what had to happen. He was joyful about what was coming. In order to have Easter Sunday – you have to have Good Friday! A lot of people don’t recognize that. We look at Good Friday as a day of atonement; a day of sadness; also, with the knowledge that Jesus did not stay on the grave long. There are other leaders in the world – Mohammed, and Buddha and others – they are still in their graves – but Jesus isn’t. He walked out on the third day – my goodness!

I want to draw you back to Isaiah 53:10-12. Isaiah had foretold about the Messiah in Isaiah 53:10-12 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.”* Can you see that he spoke of Jesus? God the Father gave us through His Son the priceless gift of salvation, and it is absolutely free, no strings attached, just three nails, paid for by Christ, but being a Christian, 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, like Barnabas, instead of wondering who will be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ‘Bar’ meaning ‘son of’ and ‘nabas’ meaning ‘encouragement; Joseph Barnabas. Instead of wondering who will be the greatest in the kingdom – we should be lifting each other up, holding each other up when we fall down.

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.

Each of these beloved friends of Jesus would indeed drink from the cup, but in different ways:

- James died as a martyr—Herod ordered for him to be put to death by the sword, as we are told in Acts 12:2.
- John lived through many years of persecution, including surviving, as told by tradition and writings, being boiled in hot oil, yet walking out unscathed, before being forced to live in exile on the island of Patmos. 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

Twenty-Second Sunday After Pentecost, October 21, 2018, Liturgical Year “B”

also the price required to follow Christ. 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’ words indicate to us that He will distribute eternal rewards according to the Father’s decisions. In this statement – Jesus reveals that He was under the authority of the Father, who alone makes the decisions about leadership in heaven.

- Such rewards are not granted as favors.
- They are reserved for those whom God selects.
- Those words when Jesus said that no one knows the hour or the day – except the Father tells us clearly who is ‘driving the bus’ – God the Father!

I find it ironic that these two Sons of Thunder – who faithfully asked to be on either side of Jesus, would see two others 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.”* Transgressors – and Jesus came to save the transgressors. 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) That word that you hear when I walk down the aisle during the “Comfortable Words” – propitiation – that is the payment – that is the payment! He paid our bill – the one we are still ringing up and asking for forgiveness. Whenever we get off the track that we have been called to take – Jesus reminds us to hear His words – and that just as we need to always put Him first – that He put us first as He gave of Himself – His very life for us.

From all of this we can take that we can feel free to ask God for anything, Jesus told us that!

- God wants to give us what is best for us, not merely what we want.
- We need to keep in mind that His answer may not be yes, or it may be not now – but it is always what is best for us.