

Mark 10:35-45

What would you think were a young child to approach his parents and tell them, “Mom and Dad, I want you to do for me whatever I ask of you.” You might be tempted to stick around and watch the fireworks. We are privy to such a conversation in our Gospel reading for today. James and John approach Jesus and tell Him these exact words. But these aren’t three-year-olds asking their parents to let them rule the household. These are grown men, Jesus’ hand-picked disciples telling their Creator, their God and Lord, to do things not His way, but theirs; to let not “Thy will be done,” but their will.

James and John were completely backwards in their thinking. “*We want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.*” That’s not what we say to God; it’s what He says to us! It’s called the Ten Commandments. “These commands,” He says to each one of us, “are what I want you to do...for Me.” And He has every right to make such a request, such a demand of us, for He is our God. By what right do James and John, or any of us, approach Him and say, “*Do for us whatever we ask of you!*”

I’m half-surprised that Jesus didn’t bust out laughing at the request of James and John. But He didn’t. Instead, He responded in all seriousness, “*What do you want Me to do for you?*” Now they could have prayed -- because this is what this is...when we approach God to make a request of Him, it’s called prayer -- they could have prayed for a stronger faith, for endurance in times of temptation, for the Holy Spirit to give them wisdom and understanding. But no...they asked for glory. No suffering along the way; no persecution for living their faith; not the struggle, just the reward. “*Grant us,*” they said, “*to sit, one at Your right hand, and one at your left, in Your glory.*”

Shame on them. But shame on us as well. For like James and John, we consider how well we have followed our Lord; we look at the high points of our discipleship, and we figure that we, too, are entitled to something, some glory, some type of reward. We want to be noticed. We want others to look up to us and honor us. Like James and John, we don’t want the seats of less honor; we want the seats of glory.

But this is how the world operates. Striving to be number one at the expense of others. Flipping off the driver who cuts you off because how dare he dishonor you! Withholding praise from others because that makes them look better than me.

In the world, glory and honor are connected to how high you rise in the ranks; to how much wealth you accumulate; to how many twitter followers you have; how many Oscars or Emmys sit on your closet shelf.

One big difference between the ways of the world and the ways of God is that the world strives after, but God gives. The world seeks the path of glory, but God seeks the path of suffering. The world takes for itself, but God gives of Himself. The request of James and John, “*Do for us whatever we ask of You,*” does not come from the heart of God, but from the selfishness of the sinful world which lives in all of us.

Next week, which is Holy Week, we see very clearly the heart of our God. He drinks the cup of suffering which we are unable to drink. He is baptized with the fire of hell to keep that fire away from us. He picks up His cross to give His life as a ransom for many. At the end of Holy Week comes the glory. But Jesus is glorified not by seeking glory and honor, but by giving up everything for you and me. For people, sinners like us, who by nature are selfish and self-centered, Jesus gladly suffers everything that our sins deserve.

When Jesus replied, “*What do you want Me to do for you?*” at the selfish request of James and John, it was natural for Him to reply in this way. Jesus was never about Himself, but only about what He could do for others. He never took, He never grabbed. He never spoke, “What about Me? What about what I want?” The only thing Jesus wants is what is best for you.

And so when His Heavenly Father said, “Son, I have a request of You,” He immediately replied, “*What do You want Me to do for You?*” “I want You to drink the cup of agony and suffering...I want You to be baptized with the fire of My wrath...I want You to give Your life as a ransom for many.” And when the Father said this to His Son, our Lord replied, “All this I gladly suffer.”

If anyone had a right to defend himself, it was Jesus. If anyone had a right to accuse his accusers, it was Jesus. But He gives up His rights. Instead, He lowers Himself to the lowest place of all. He is whipped, beaten, spat upon by sinful men. He is crucified and left to die, and all He says in response is, “*Father, forgive them.*”

This is your God, your Lord. This is who you come here to worship. This is who calls you His dear children. No wonder the Bible tells us that “*God is love.*” He doesn’t punish you for your selfishness; He forgives you. He doesn’t laugh at your weaknesses, at your prayers which sound sometimes like the ridiculous request of James and John; He does for you exactly what you need.

He knows our frailty. He is right there with us in our sufferings. Not one of us is in our glory yet. We’re still stuck on the thorns, but the rose is coming. Not because we earn it or deserve it, but because Jesus earned it for us. And He promises you that the glory and joy in the end is worth the struggle now.

He does give you His cup to drink, as a foretaste of what is coming. But His cup contains only grace for you. Jesus drained all the poison out of it. He drank down all the agony and punishment for sin. All that is left for you to drink is blessed forgiveness, life, and salvation. And that cup is sitting here on the altar for you.

Friends, this is why we gather here as we do. Not because God demands it, but to drink the cup of forgiveness. To receive the gifts of God’s grace. This grace, this mercy is yours right now in Christ. Turn away from your failings. Look not at your selfish heart. Look, rather, to your God who forgives you. Look at His heart which is full only of love for you. Go in peace, friend, your sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. Amen.