

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

March 21, 2021 – Fifth Sunday in Lent

“Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant...”

– Mark 10:43 –

Two of Jesus’ followers approach him and say, “Lord, grant us to sit at your right and your left when you come into your kingdom.” In other words, “Lord, when we get you elected Messiah, grant us positions in your cabinet.” Jesus replies to this perfectly understandable request by saying, “You don’t know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?” Of course, we know what the disciples don’t. The road that Jesus walks will lead to suffering and sacrifice. The “cup” that he is about to drink is the cup of crucifixion. The “baptism” that will drown him is death on a cross. The disciples show that they are clueless when they respond, “Sure! We can do that! No problem!”

Like the first disciples, you and I show up in a similar way on a Sunday morning. Are you able to receive the peace, the benefits, the joy, the reassurance, or whatever it is that Jesus is handing out this week? “Sure, we’re ready!” we answer. “But are you able to suffer, to be rejected and disappointed as I am about to be?” Jesus asks. Well, are you? Christ’s small band of followers reply, “Absolutely!” Jesus responds, “You will drink the cup that I drink, you will be baptized with my baptism.” The promise is NOT that they will share glory and happiness, and rewards with him. But that if they follow him, they will necessarily share his humility and sacrifice.

I’ve been thinking about that these days, as our congregations endure unprecedented challenges. Are we able to drink the cup of hardship and uncertainty as our Lord did? Are we able to be baptized into difficulty and trust God for the outcome? Are we able to persevere together, in order to emerge a better and stronger church? Be careful how you answer. When Jesus came into his glory, it was not on a throne. It was on a cross, with two thieves beside him. This is the message we Christians have been reluctant to proclaim to the world, because we are reluctant to hear it ourselves.

Jesus is not a technique for getting what we want from God. Jesus is God’s way of getting what He wants from us! God wants a world redeemed and restored, a world where people fear, love, and trust him in equal measure. The way God gets that is with ordinary people like us who are willing to walk like Jesus, talk like Jesus, and yes, if need be, even suffer like Jesus.

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