

St. Paul Lutheran Church
Grant Park, Illinois
The Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost, October 21, 2018
Mark 10:35-45

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said.

"Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" "We can," they answered. Jesus said to 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." When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.

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."

I want you to picture yourself driving somewhere important. Maybe it is to a wedding or job interview. You don't really know the route and you're relying on google maps or your gps to get you there. You're dutifully following the route which it has you going on and you might make it, but when you come around a corner what do you see? A familiar (and extremely unwelcome) sign across the road which says, "Road Closed: Local Traffic only."

Your way to your destination is blocked by a closed road and as a result you're going to be late to an incredibly important event. What is your reaction? Frustration? Disappointment? Anger? Fear? Something else? I would imagine any of these emotions would fit your mood, but would any of you view the road block in front of you as an opportunity where you get to go on an adventure and see something you've never seen?

Our gospel lesson introduces us to two of Jesus' disciples, James and John, whose ambition is to be on the path to greatness in God's kingdom. Their ambition leads them to ask Jesus about their path to greatness. **"Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we want you to do for us whatever we ask.' 'What do you want me to do for you?' he asked. They replied, 'Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.'"**

Their request pictures Jesus as a powerful ruler and their ambition leads them to dream of being important rulers in Jesus' kingdom. They want people to look at them and be amazed at their importance. It is an interesting request, but Jesus' response warns them about obstacles in their path. **"'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said. 'Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?'"**

"'We can,' they answered. Jesus said to 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.'" Did you catch the obstacles Jesus warns them about? He says their path will be blocked with pain and suffering, but James and John say they can handle it. Jesus then tells them he can't promise them the spots they are asking for.

How do James and John respond? They don't get a chance because another huge road block pops up. **"When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John."** The other ten disciples hear James and John's request and they aren't happy about it. I don't think the fact the other disciples are jealous of James and John should be all that surprising. How come? They want those same powerful positions which James and John are after.

The ten disciples' reaction to James and John's request reveals anger is a natural reaction when someone (or something) else blocks their path to something they want. Think back to our introduction and the reaction you have when road construction blocks your path to somewhere important. People get angry and upset because their path is blocked and they are going to be late to a place where they had to be on time.

Now, think about the way people react when someone else has something they want. How does a little child react when they are told they can't have the toy because another child is playing with it? They kick,

scream and throw a fit because they don't get their way. How does an adult react when someone stands in their way to be promoted at work? They apply for a promotion, but end up being passed over by a person whose only qualification for the job is they are really good looking.

Or maybe you're trying to decide what to do on a Saturday night. There is a really important football game on, but you're the only one who wants to watch it. Are you very happy when you get drug along to go to have supper with your wife's friends who you personally have nothing in common with? Or maybe you're driving somewhere and there is a quilt shop or baking store which interests you and you want to stop, but you're told no that would be a waste of time.

Now, do you understand the disciples' reaction to James and John's request? **"When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John."** We don't like it when others block our way. We don't like being told no and often time we can end up viewing these people as nothing more than road blocks and obstacles which make us mad because they block our ambition to make our lives better or make us feel more important.

Is this the path to greatness in Jesus' kingdom? **"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.'"** Jesus tells us selfishness and getting our way isn't the path to greatness in his kingdom.

What is the path to greatness in Jesus' kingdom? Jesus says the path to greatness is through serving others. Jesus doesn't want us to view others as road blocks to our happiness or to getting our way. He wants us to view other people as opportunities for us to display love our love for God. How can Jesus call people who hurt me, who prevent me from getting my way or who really don't care about me opportunities to display my love for God?

"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." The reason Jesus wants us to serve people who hurt us, who block our path or really don't care about us is because he loves them and came to serve them. Jesus' main goal in this world was to serve others. His main life's work was to live for others in order to keep God's law perfectly for people who could not and did not want to keep God's law.

Jesus came to serve you for the times you get angry with another person who because they took the toy you wanted for yourself. How did he serve you? He served you by never getting angry with people who were selfish and took what rightfully belonged to him. Jesus came to serve you for the times you became jealous because you felt you were wrongfully passed over for a promotion. How did he serve you? He never became jealous of the earthly success another person had.

Jesus came to serve you for all the times you grumbled and complained because you had to do something you didn't want to do or didn't get to do something you really wanted to do. How did he serve you? Jesus willingly went to the cross a place where he was not excited to go (because he suffered

the pains of hell on it) for you to forgive your selfishness and your grumbling and complaining because you didn't get your way.

“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.” Jesus came to serve you and ransom you from your sins of anger and jealousy which held you captive from a place you could never get out of on your own. Not only did Jesus serve as your ransom and mine, but do you know who else he is a ransom for? He is a ransom for the people who block your ambition and make your life difficult.

The people who make your life difficult live in a dog eat dog world. They understand Jesus' words when he says, **“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.’”** They understand cruelty and injustice because they have suffered these things many times in their lives. They have been hurt by them too many times to count. How can you show love for those who suffer?

“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.” You show love for them by striving to serve them because your ambition in life is to show your Lord's love to others. Jesus wants you and me to view others as opportunities to serve because our service displays his love for them. The people we serve might know Jesus' love and they might not. It makes no difference in Jesus' eyes. Service is love.

Does service sound hard? Absolutely. It isn't natural to put others wants and needs ahead of our own. It hurts because we really really really like getting our way and the people we serve don't always appreciate our service and sacrifice. I get it, but sometimes the choice to show someone love hurts because it hurts our sinful nature. However, our new self, which longs to serve Jesus, rejoices at the chance to serve Jesus by serving others.

What is our motivation to serve Jesus? Our motivation is we want to serve others because loves them. You never know what difference your service might make for someone. Jesus might give you the opportunity to serve them by sharing the wonderful message, **“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”** with someone who never knew it and gets to reap eternal benefits because of it. Amen.