

20/10/2024 Mark 10:32-45 Pastor Fraser Pearce

In Mark's Gospel, after we have heard Jesus
For the first time foretell his suffering, death, and resurrection,
Jesus asks this fundamental question of human existence: **For what will it profit a person to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?** Mark 8:36-37

Of course, the answer is that there is no profit to gain the world
If, by so doing, we lose life itself;
And there is nothing that we can give in exchange for our life.
There's nothing that we can give.

But today I'm proclaiming Good News from God's word:
Jesus, who suffered humiliation, rejection, and death for our sake,
He is the one who can ransom our souls,
And bring us into life in God's kingdom that not even death can destroy.

To get into today's reading I want to go back a few verses,
So that we can get a feel for what is happening when James and John
Make their request to Jesus. Here's what we read just before: **They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid.**

We know that Jesus is on the road, on the way
To his suffering, death, and resurrection: twice before in the Gospel
Jesus had spoken to his disciples plainly about it,
And now he is walking ahead, leading the way
It's now that Jesus makes clear to his disciples that it is this way,
The way to Jerusalem, that is the way to the cross: **[Jesus] took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.'**

If you compare this foretelling to the previous two
Then you will see similarities and differences:
In this third and final foretelling Jesus adds that it is at Jerusalem
The holy city of God, the place of the temple, his Father's house,
That all these things will take place.
He adds that he will be handed over, betrayed into the hands of
Gentiles – those outside the household of God,
And he also specifies the nature of the humiliation and suffering:

Being mocked, spat upon, and flogged.

So, there should be no lack of clarity among the disciples

About what Jesus says will happen, about the way that Jesus is on.

And yet just as Peter fails to understand Jesus

After he foretells his passion the first time;

And just as the disciples as a group fail to understand the second time,

So now James and John fail to understand the third time.

This is how today's reading then begins: **James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to [Jesus]..**

Let's think about these two. In Mark's Gospel, right in the first chapter,

We read that Jesus calls the brothers, James and John,

To be his disciples. In terms of order they are numbers three and four:

Jesus has already called the brothers Simon (that is, Peter) and Andrew.

Now, you might think, that in terms of human power,

The Simon/Andrew pairing will be dominant over

The James/John pairing, but when we read the Gospel it turns out

That Jesus on significant occasions brings Peter, James, and John

Together without Andrew: he does this when the girl restored to life (Mark 5);

He does this at the transfiguration (Mark 9);

And he will do this in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14).

The Gospel doesn't say *why* Jesus does this: we have to think about it.

One thing the Gospel has already made very clear, however,

Is that the disciples are concerned about worldly status:

They have already had arguments about who is the greatest,

And the argument is not over.

This is what we read: **James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to [Jesus] and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.'** Now this is, of course, cheeky: students asking the teacher,

More than this: they are asking Jesus to write a blank cheque for them.

On the other, hand, Jesus has shown them special favour,

And Andrew has been left evidently somewhat on the outer,

So, what better time to make a power move?

The funny thing is that Jesus does not shut them down,

But invites them to state their case: **And he said to them, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.'**

Evidently James and John have heard, but not understood, Jesus.
They seem to have in mind that Jesus is on the way to worldly power,
And they want to have a chief share in the spoils of authority:
To be key figures in the new administration.
Now, Jesus does not criticise them for aspiring to greatness,
But he is going lead them back onto the way where true greatness is found.

This is what we read: **But Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’ They replied, ‘We are able.’ Then Jesus said to them, ‘The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.’**

To get an idea of what Jesus is taking about here,

Think about how he prays to the Father in the garden.

This is how we hear Jesus pray there: **Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this *cup* from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want. (Mark 14:36)**

Jesus is going to his Jerusalem: he will drink a bitter cup of suffering,

And be overwhelmed in the waters of death.

Indeed, the disciples will, in time, share in his suffering

In a way they cannot yet comprehend,

But for now, Jesus tells them how different things are in God’s kingdom:

We don not ourselves choose the glory we will share in –

Not even Jesus has that to grant, but the Father alone,

But this is not a cause of envy or resentment,

Because in God’s kingdom love reigns.

But the disciples are not yet living in the fulness of the kingdom,

Because this is what we read next: **When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John.** Why, do you think, that they got angry?

There are many complementary responses to this question

It seems to me: that they envy James and John exploiting their position;

That they resent James and John getting in before them;

That they are irritated by the sheer cheek of James and John.

No doubt, as you think why you yourself would be angry,

You can think of more reasons for their angry.

The thing is, Jesus sees the response of the other ten disciples

As being at least as problematic as the request of James and John;

Perhaps it’s even the case that their response is worse,

Because at least James and John were aspiring to greatness,
While the ten are evidently expressing angry resentment.
This is how Jesus deals with their response: **So Jesus called them...**
Just as he had first called them at the beginning of his ministry,
So now again calls them back to the path of discipleship.

So Jesus called them and said to them, 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

Greatness; true authority; glory is different in the kingdom of God.
It is not seen in bending others to one's own will,
But in serving others: in seeing their need.
It is good to be truly great, to exercise real authority,
To share in lasting glory: but trying to find this greatness
By pushing oneself forward, by using compulsion on others,
By scheming behind closed doors, this won't work,
It leads to the loss of one's soul, to the forfeiting of all one has.

But Jesus shows us a different way, the way of real greatness.
This is what he says: **For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'**

For the first time in the Gospel we hear why Jesus
Is going to his suffering and death: to do for us
What we could not do ourselves: to ransom our souls.
Jesus is here making it clear that he, the true Son of David,
The Christ, the Messiah, the one who inaugurates the everlasting kingdom,
Is also the suffering servant, foretold by Isaiah the prophet
In words we heard today: **The righteous one, my servant... bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.** Isaiah 53

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Your Lord Jesus gave his life as a ransom for you.
Our Father knows that we could never win back what we had lost,
And in love sent his Son who showed the greatness of God
In his life of servant love.
So let us learn how to serve, and in our lives enthrone him,
Each other's needs to prefer, for it is Christ we're serving.
In Jesus' name. Amen.