

Mark 10:32-45

32 And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, 33 saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. 34 And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days, he will rise.”

35 And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” 36 And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” 37 And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” 38 Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” 39 And they said to him, “We are able.” And 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, 40 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.” 41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. 42 And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave[b] of all. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The Word of God

**The Word of Life**

Today, I want to focus on James and John and their request for power, prestige, and prosperity. They want to be second in position only to Jesus. Their request comes right after Jesus tries to tell them for the third time what lies ahead.

Again, like the other two times they don't seem to grasp what he says. Instead, James and John come to him and ask him to do what they request. He replies, "What do you want?" Even though this breaks the rule that there is no such thing as a stupid question, they find one. They request that they be appointed to hold the top two positions when Jesus comes in glory. They want to be on his right and left when he comes in his glory. (We know that two criminals have those positions on the cross.)

So, Jesus tells them, "You don't get it. My life and ministry have been about service, not position, power, prestige, and privilege. You're using the wrong model for your life. Your model is based on exerting power and benefiting from privilege; that is not what I am about." Jesus tries to tell them that his life and ministry have always been about love, service, and sacrifice. And that is the ministry he calls his followers to.

I would like to share how I understand this call and that inspires me to want to live this way, not that I am always successful, far from it.

One of my favorite devotional writers, Ron Rolheiser, puts it this way. "We're all different, so not everyone will find truth and depth the same way. Each one of us must therefore do our own, deeply personal, search here. For me, the words of various authors have carried this kind of truth."

From Searching for a Word Filled with Reality November 13, 2013, a subscription email I receive.

These words helped me discover that truth and depth come from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I first heard these words on a CD, a track entitled "A Shepherd Leading His Flock. His words form the guiding vision for my ministry. Later, I discovered those words come from a portion of his February 4, 1968, Message at Ebenezer Baptist Church called The Drum Major Instinct. (This was preached two months before his death.) It is an adaptation of the 1952 homily "Drum-Major Instincts" by J. Wallace Hamilton, a well-known, liberal, white Methodist preacher.

Dr. King's message is based on today's Gospel lesson. He tells us that the drum major instinct is to be out front, lead the parade, and be first.

Dr. King bases his message on James and John's request to be the disciples' leaders. They want to be the top dogs, lead the disciples, and be out front with Jesus instead of following him.

In response, Jesus tells James and John that they are way off base. Instead of trying to usurp leadership, they should instead focus on service. Jesus puts it this way, "But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all."

He finishes his message with these words that I am always moved by.

He begins "This morning, you can be on his right hand and his left hand if you serve.": It's the only way in.

And Dr. King continues with words of power that have inspired me for many years.

"Every now and then I guess we all think realistically about that day when we will be victimized with what is life's final common denominator. And that's something that we call death. We all think about it, and every now and then I think about my own death. And I think about my own funeral, and I don't think of it in a morbid sense.

"Every now and then I ask myself, what it is that I would want said when I leave the word to you this morning? If any of you are around, when I have to meet my day, I don't want a long funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell them not to talk too long. And every now and then I wonder what I want them to say. Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize, that isn't important.

"Tell them not to mention that I have three or four hundred other awards, that's not important. Tell them not to mention where I went to school. I'd like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to give his life serving others.

"I'd like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to love somebody. I want you to say that day that I tried to be right on the war question. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try to feed the hungry.

"I want you to be able to say that day that I did try in my life to clothe those who were naked. I want you to say on that day that I did try in my life to visit those who were imprisoned. I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity.

“Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace. I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter. I won’t have any money to leave behind.

“I won’t have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind. And that’s all I want to say. If I can help somebody as I pass along, if I can cheer somebody with a word or song, if I can show somebody he’s traveling wrong, then my living will not be in vain.

“If I can do my duty as a Christian, or if I can bring salvation to a world once wrought, if I can spread the message as the Master taught, then my living will not be in vain. Yes, Jesus, I want to be on Your right or Your left side, not for any selfish reason. I want to be on Your right or Your left side, not in terms of some political kingdom or ambition. But I just want to be there in love and in justice and in truth and in commitment to others so that we can make of this old world a new world.”

In those words, I feel the power of Jesus moving my spirit to seek a deeper life of faithful living.

Jesus takes James and John’s request for power and glory and stands them on their heads. We can use the quote Robin Sharma (my favorite personal growth author) attributes to the Rotary Club: “The one who serves the best prospers the most. Our call is to serve to the best of our ability.”

Jesus’ basic measurement for a successful prosperous life of faith is a life lived in sacrificial love for one another. This is the life Jesus lived for us. That is the love with which he redeemed us, and Jesus calls us to share that love and continue the work of redemption.

The Apostle Paul put it this way in Philippians 2:1-11:

<sup>1</sup> If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup> make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

<sup>6</sup>who, though he existed in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be grasped,  
<sup>7</sup>but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
assuming human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a human,  
<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.  
<sup>9</sup>Therefore God exalted him even more highly  
and gave him the name  
that is above every other name,  
<sup>10</sup>so that at the name given to Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
<sup>11</sup>and every tongue should confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

In our following Jesus' path of service to others, we find our glory and exhalation. To quote Robin Sharma again "Helping is more valuable than acquiring." (p. 358 *The Wealth Money Can't Buy*.)

Or, as the Zac Brown Band sang with Jimmy Buffett, "When you lose yourself. You find the key to paradise." – Knee Deep