

## WHAT DO WE REALLY DESIRE?

Mark 10:32-45  
Isaiah 53:4-12

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What is it that we really desire? Do we really want fame? Think about having the paparazzi hounding you day and night. Think about having your life spread across the tabloids for the world to see. Do we really want unlimited power? Farcical as it was, the movie *Bruce Almighty* where Jim Carey was given all the power of God and discovered how much chaos and how much responsibility came with the “job” is a great illustration of our Gospel text today.

Again, our Gospel reading may be a familiar set of verses. While walking along the road toward Jerusalem, and while Jesus is trying to teach His followers a lesson on what would happen in that city, the two Sons of Thunder approach. In some ways, theirs seems a logical request. Jesus has recently told them about how God can do the impossible...well, what he said, if you recall, is that with humans certain things are impossible, but with God all things are possible.

So, we can imagine that James and John have been discussing this. And, again, being close readers of the *Gospel according to Mark*, we know how obtuse the disciples are. Therefore, we can imagine that these two brothers aren't getting any of what Jesus is saying about His life, His ministry, of God's work in and through Him. Instead, they are thinking about their own lives in the here and now, viewing the coming Kingdom as an extension of the world as they know it.

We do that. We find ourselves thinking that the way to cure all the world's ills, all the world's problems is more power. But, then, we be-

come guilty of the same mindset as James and John. And, Jesus' words are just as pertinent to our lives today. Notice how Jesus gives an accurate description of how people love exercising power over others. If we try to say that the Bible is apolitical, then we fail to see what is being said here. Jesus identifies a system, a political system, in the broadest of terms.

People love power, and people tend to love the powerful. In the world's eyes, the greatest is the one who can dominate. Coaches of athletic teams and analysts of sporting events speak of how a person dominates on the field or the court. In other areas of life, the greatest is the person who has the most money or who wields the most influence. Yet, as is so often, when Jesus speaks about the Kingdom of God, or being a faithful disciple, He turns what we expect, what we know (or think we know), even what we desire most on its head.

We should acknowledge that James and John are honest about their intentions. Their request is clear; they want to be next to the most powerful person they know. They want some of Jesus' power and they assume that that is what Jesus wants. What is worrisome are the people who are unaware that the desire for power is driving them, and they hide it from themselves and others with fine and seductive words.

And, we should also recognize ourselves in James and John. After all, if God is all-powerful, and if Jesus is the Son of God, the Anointed of God, wouldn't it be understandable that we would want to have a

piece of that power? Sociologists and anthropologists have long recognized that people's gods are their idols, so to speak. People's gods are their models. People's gods affect people's values; and people's values create people's idols; that is, their gods. This is a mutually supportive system; one that is played out in our own time. Look around. On television, we have a plethora of shows whose theme is to be or create the next great American idol in song, in dance, in modeling, in surviving, in restaurants, in sports, even in business.

But, Jesus deliberately subverts such a power system. He doesn't say, "Leave the power to me, or to God; you are to be slaves!" No, that would reinforce the power system in which, for there to be powerful people, there have to be powerless and dis-empowered people. The world is full of this type of power. And, to be honest, much of the Bible's language of "serving God" is colored with the imagery of servitude towards a ruler – which is derived from the worship of worldly rulers and their courts. But, the writer of *Mark* is clear; Jesus is not wanting subservience. In fact, Jesus says so directly, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..."

So, what do we really desire? If not power, if not dominance, then what? Because, our world is shaped by two foci, power and identity. Who has power? And, who are we? Jesus tells us that His purpose is not to exercise power in our traditional sense. When He does arrive in Jerusalem, and is brought before the Sanhedrin and before Pilate, Jesus doesn't call down a host of angels to free Himself. And, when He's hanging on the cross, His mortal body dying, He doesn't pop the

nails from His hands and feet, and jump down to take vengeance upon those who put Him there. He lives out His very own words...He gives His life as ransom for many.

We see being a servant as a bad thing. We see it as a sign of weakness. What we forget is that Jesus calls us to join Him. In the *Gospel according to John*, Jesus declares that the disciples (and thereby, us) are to be His friends, not His servants (15:15) In our text this morning, He declares we are not to be like those of the world, but, that what it means to be great is be a servant to all.

We are invited to find ourselves mirrored in these scenes written down by *Mark*. We are asked to step into the story and participate in reflecting on Jesus' words and actions. What does it mean to be great in the Kin-dom of God? What does it do to others when we exercise the world's power? And, what happens when we act as servants? How do we expose our desire for power, even while trying to live as citizens in God's Kin-dom? Are we willing to be true followers of Jesus and become servants?

Hard questions from what seems to be an innocuous text. But, then, Jesus often comes to us that way, getting us to reflect on what is really going on, and how we really should be acting and saying and doing. His call is not to avoid leadership, but to overcome the desire for power with service, with compassion, with love. May we all walk in His way.

Let us pray: O Holy and mighty God, You alone are all-powerful. Your Son reminds us that we are to live as He did, humbly, with great compassion, having a servant's heart and attitude, willingly surrendering to Your will, to Your plan for our lives. Give us the ability to see that our desire for power, for fame, for attention is not how You want us to live. And, let us hold on to the lasting desire of loving You, loving our Biblical neighbors, and living in Your Kingdom which is without end. In the name of our Lord, Your Son, Jesus, we pray. Amen