

Mark 10:32-45

Jesus is heading to Jerusalem, it's the religious capital, they've been there before, but he's saying odd things again... *I'm going to be arrested by the religious leaders, they'll have me convicted and hand me over to the Romans to be humiliated and executed, three days later, I'll rise again.* This is the 3rd time Jesus has spoken about his death, and the 3rd time the disciples can't grasp what's going to happen and the type of Messiah he is.

They are amazed, and those on the fringes are afraid. *Every time he's gone there, he's had more trouble... If he knows what their plans are, why are we going THIS way, into the thick of it? Is he MAD? It won't just be him, it'll be OUR necks! The Romans don't tolerate confrontation or insurrection, we've seen the bodies hanging by the roadside.*

That's one of the conversations bubbling up amongst the 12.

We met the rich young ruler last week, he was given some tough homework and the disciples were aghast. How can **anyone** follow this man? They point out they've already given everything to follow, but they were concerned about what costs might be further up the road - especially if that road lead to Jerusalem.

As they walk, their shoulders are sagging, their stomachs are churning, they're thinking about their fishing nets and their homes, they'd rather not go to Jerusalem this week. I imagine they're dragging their feet. Meanwhile, James and John are hanging back chatting quietly.

Don't worry, he assures them as they tick everything over, no one who has left house or family or businesses, for my sake will fail to have the resources and support they need along with the hardships. But it won't play out they way they are used to... *many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.* I don't think the sons of Zebedee had heard this last part, but perhaps they are like others, looking for security against their fears.

Teacher, [they pipe up] we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you. [Jesus raises his eyebrows] And says to them, Yes... What is it you want me to do? They said to him, We want you to arrange for us to the highest places of honour when you set up your rule — one of us at your right, the other at your left.

Bold words, you can imagine how furious the others were when they heard it. Jesus considers the request. I'm not sure, if he is stunned or smirking?

Really? he says. You are up to the task? Do you know what you're asking? You think you have what it takes to stand by my left and right side?

Sure, they say Why not?

It reminds me of Yoda the Jedi Master in Star Wars as he considers training the young Luke Skywalker...who is as self confident as the rich young ruler and these brothers, with little idea what he is offering himself up for.

I'm ready, I can be a Jedi! [Luke says with bravado]

Ready are you? What know you of ready? ... Adventure. Heh. Excitement. Heh. A Jedi craves not these things. You are reckless. [Yoda]

I won't fail you. I'm not afraid. [Luke boasts]

You will be. You will be. [Yoda replies]

Yoda didn't mock Luke, or turn him away, he frankly laid out what was ahead. There's nothing wrong with sparky commitment from an aspiring disciple, so in the same way, Jesus didn't condemn the young ruler's passion, nor rebuke the brothers (certainly not in the way he put Peter in his place when he was out of line), and he doesn't say 'forget it guys, there's just no way'. He knows *they* have no idea of what he is leading them into, the cost that will be paid by the Messiah nor what they will face ahead themselves. But **he** knows. He gives them some healthy realism. Without patronising them he says:

*you **will** drink the cup I drink, **and** be baptised in my baptism. [you will indeed face fear and death] But as to awarding places of honour, that's not my business.*

Thankfully, they are also words of promise, 'you **will** be able to follow me, and make it to the destination.' The 12 don't know have the tradition of the Eucharist yet, but we hear through that lens...the cup of salvation, wine poured out of a cup of suffering, a cup of life, hope and fellowship. Vivid words.

We might not be as bold as these boys, but many of us aspire for privileges. We want Jesus to set us up with the ideal church, the ideal pastor. We want a good reputation in our workplace, a good salary, a dream house, a safe retirement. We want our grandchildren to be at the top of the class. We want a lot of things that we never admit out loud. Are we much different from sons of Zebedee? We can come to terms with our tendencies, and walk on as better disciples.

Jesus settles both the ambition and the indignation buzzing around, with a lesson on leadership and the kingdom of God:

You've observed how our leaders throw their weight around, and how people get a little power and it goes to their heads. It's not going to be that way with you.

Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for many who are held hostage.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace, he brings the cup of salvation, the living water, he promises life in abundance. But he also promises a narrow road, hardship and conflict, and a path that demands perseverance. He warned his friends it would be as mixed a bag for them as it had been for him: the world would not always welcome their message, nor the people they were called to be.

James, John, this is what it means to sit beside me, to walk with me along the road, this is the sort of kingdom I am setting up. Will you be initiated into this with me, and will you drink the cup of suffering that comes with it? Or were you looking for something more prestigious? Ironically, neither of them would be on his left or right as he established his kingdom - he was accompanied in his grisly death by two convicted criminals - not particularly glorious. We do well to hear this. The path of Christ is one of humility and also of self sacrifice and other centred-ness rather than self promotion. This is why we count the cost before we decide to wear the badge and follow Jesus, its a tough gig.

We've observed how leaders throw their weight around in this world, and how power goes to people's heads. It must not be that way with you.

Each day, whether in government, business, community or the church, we face the problem of how to align the interests of leaders with the interests and needs of followers as well as with the overall mission of organisations. And as believers we align our overall mission with God's plans and Christ's ways. It's something we did at Synod this week. As we voted, modified clauses and amended bills we were regularly reminded that we are episcopally led and synodically governed, that we are a faith community not a business, though we have recently been incorporated. We were challenged to keep our core mission at the centre, and to keep spiritual matters in sight as we managed temporal issues. Some speakers were at pains to guard against agenda's which might be based on ambition, or those which lacked transparency.

Our denomination and structures try to ensure the dynamic of servanthood keeps guiding our institution, through things like synod.

The model Jesus provides is one of servanthood and servant leadership, a powerful antidote to striving for material possessions, individual achievement, prestige, titles, salary, position and power. It's costly to choose servanthood, but taking up this cross doesn't mean being a door mat, or passively accepting violence or abuse. It is an active peace-making way of resisting the dominating and selfish systems and practices of our day, which then chooses godliness as a lifestyle. Jesus held his course of resistance and difference even to his death at the hands of the system he came to renew, but in a paradox his love set us free from it, free to serve him out of gratitude. Confessing our complicity in the self-promoting ways, we accept his salvation and respond by putting into practice what we have learnt from him by the power of his Spirit.

We have a Gospel that is very good news. The Father has begun making all things new. Jesus has saved us, changed us and calls us to nothing he has not walked himself. He has forged a path, he is waiting ahead, and has provided a reliable guide for the journey who will enable us to be transformed into his likeness each day. Seeing the difference he made, and makes in us, we are inspired and we follow him.

Let's finish with the prayer of St Francis.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:

where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

O Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console,

to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen

Feasting on the word.

Summary

This is the 3rd time Jesus has spoken about his death, and the 3rd time the disciples can't grasp what's going to happen and the type of Messiah he is. They are amazed at his words, and those on the fringes are afraid. *Every time he's gone there, he's had more trouble...If he knows what their plans are, why are we going THIS way, into the thick of it? Is he MAD? It won't just be him, it'll be OUR necks!* That's one of the conversations bubbling up amongst the 12.

Their shoulders are sagging, their stomachs are churning, they're thinking about their fishing nets and their homes, they'd rather not go to Jerusalem this week. Meanwhile, James and John are hanging back chatting quietly. Last week Jesus said...*many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.* I don't think the sons of Zebedee heard this, but perhaps they are looking for security against their fears, being savvy in a world where you have to make your own successes. 'Arrange for us sit at your right and left.' *Really?* Jesus says. *Do you know what you're asking. Are you capable of drinking the cup I drink, of being baptised in the baptism I'm about to be plunged into? You think you have what it takes?* Jesus settles both the ambition and the indignation buzzing around, with a lesson on servant leadership, an antidote to the usual leadership that strives for material

Sunday 21 October 2018

possessions, prestige, titles, salary, position and power. Helpful words for us, too in our dog eat dog, individualistic world.

Taking up the cross of servanthood, doesn't mean being a door mat, or passively accepting violence or abuse. It is an active way of resisting the dominating and selfish systems and practices of our day. Jesus practiced active resistance even though it meant death at the hands of the system, but in a paradox of love he set us free from it and ourselves, free to serve him out of gratitude. We put into practice what we have learnt from him. I commend to you the prayer of St Francis.