

**Sermon**  
**October 17, 2021**  
**St. Benedict's Episcopal Church, Los Osos**  
**Mark 10:35-45**

[With compliments to Janis Joplin]

Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz?  
 My friends all have Porsches, I must make amends.  
 Worked hard all my lifetime, no help from my friends.  
 Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz?

**And the disciples 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,**  
**saying "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem;**  
**and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes,**  
**and they will condemn him to death,**  
**and deliver him to the Gentiles[/Romans];**  
**and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill**  
**him;**  
**and after three days he will rise.**

**And James and John, the sons of Zebedee,**  
 [who were among the first persons called by Jesus to follow him,  
 while they were sitting in the boats mending their nets,  
 and later nicknamed by Jesus as the Sons of Thunder.  
 Funny thing about the name Zebedee – it means "God has given" –  
 so in a way, God gave James and John to Jesus.  
 Anyway, along this journey to Jerusalem,]  
**James and John came forward to Jesus and said to him,**  
**"Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."**

[Which is an amazing act ofchutzpah on their parts,  
 first for their presumption that they could dictate to Jesus  
 to do something they wanted,  
 and second, what they would eventually ask.

You see, they had rushed forward to Jesus,  
 who was showing his courage leading the procession,  
 even in the face of what he perceived to be certain death.]

**And Jesus** [being Jesus, with either great restraint or great love or great wonder,]  
**said to them,**  
**"What is it you want me to do for you?"**

[like it must be some kind of minor favor,  
 such as, may they walk with him at the head of the procession,  
 or would it be possible for them to stop for awhile  
 so they could attend to their biological needs,  
 or could they be the guests of honor  
 at the dinner they might be sharing that night.

But no, it would be nothing like that.]

**They said to him** [out of all that they had been hatching between the two of them  
 on the road,  
 and with great anticipation],

**“Grant us to sit one at your right hand and one at your left, in your  
 glory.”**

[Silence. I imagine silence, for a while.

Only the sounds of footsteps and the quieter conversation behind them.]

**But Jesus said to them,**

**“You do not know what you are asking.”**

[For sure.

It’s really the words **“in your glory”** that are getting me.

On the other hand,

the disciples were reportedly very anxious about Jesus’ turn toward  
 Jerusalem

and his laying out everything for them,  
 so isn’t it understandable that even the brightest and best among them,  
 the most courageous and energetic and imaginative,  
 might be trying to construct some alternate, better,  
 more hopeful reality than the one Jesus presented them?

But, you see, Jesus said:]

**“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?**

[I think it might have been partly due to the figurative language Jesus used here,

hiding the reality of the cup of suffering

that Jesus spent the night on the Mount of Olives

praying to God that he wouldn’t have to drink,

the duration of which James and John would be asleep,

or hiding his coming veritable experience of fire and pain

that he would endure in his passion by calling it his baptism –

it was this figurative language, surely, that enabled James and John to reply,  
 after they had confirmed the matter by glancing at one another,]

**“We are able.”**

[Don't you think the script notes would indicate more poignant silence here on Jesus' part?]

**Then Jesus said to them** [most likely still with love and understanding and forbearance,

and likely some sadness],

**"The cup that I drink you will drink;**

**and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized;"**

For, you know, it is reported that all of the disciples, with the exception of John,

died martyrs' deaths.

Because just as Jesus knew that the authorities, both religious and civil, would not abide the movement that Jesus was starting, and would sacrifice him for the sake of civil and religious order, he also knew that those he had called to follow him and witness to him would also be persecuted.

He reiterated this point several times.

And then Jesus adds, to the original point,

**"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"**

It might not be necessary to over-think the matter

of who would be prepared to be at Jesus' right and left hand, except to note that there were indeed two people beside him at his moment of glory,

if you consider that moment of glory to be when Jesus hung on that instrument of torture and death called the cross.

Yes, two thieves, one who recognized Jesus for who he was and the other not.

This is not the kind of glory seat we usually think of,

and not one that many of us would consider volunteering for.

Which might give us more understanding again for John and James, who manufactured their own prophetic versions of future events.

On the other hand, **When the ten** [other disciples,

and the many who had joined this particular caravan,] **heard this,**

[meaning not only what Jesus might have been saying to James and John, but also inferring what their initial comments were,]

**they began to get angry with James and John.**

[They recognized the whole tone-deafness of the matter.

And now they all were within a veritable crisis within a crisis.

A possible shipwreck on the way to the big shipwreck.]

**So Jesus called them** [probably stopping the procession

and speaking in a loud voice for everybody to catch up to the group at the front,  
 and maybe asking them to sit down, if that were possible,  
 especially for Simon Peter,  
 who was already well known for his hot head and impulsiveness]  
**and [Jesus] said to them** [with compassion, gentleness,  
 with the foretaste of the passion and the cup and the baptism],

**“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.  
 For the Son of Many came not to be served but to serve,  
 and to give his life a ransom for many.”**

What a thrill to follow Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of Humanity, the Child of God. What an honor to be counted followers of Jesus today, the Great Physician, the one who ushers in the Realm of God, the Great Shepherd of the Sheep, all spelled with capital letters.

And yet, Jesus might have said, “Please don’t use capital letters with me. And if you really want to follow me to life and that overflowing, put your Shift Key away for the time being. Nobody capitalizes the word “slave,” or the word “servant” or the words “give up their life.” They are written in the lower case. Like the words “humility” for “forgiveness” and “mercy” and “good news.”

This is the way of Jesus, no matter how great our anxiety, or how inflated our ideas of glory and self-importance, and or how strong our desire to be pure above others, or how insistent our pride of wanting to be right. Are we able to follow in this way? Amen.

