

Mark 10:35-45

Oct 17, 2021

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever been told by someone – to be careful what you ask for, you might get it? Or have you ever told someone else that?

When I was a kid, I really wanted a skate board. This was back in the 1970s when they were small and hard plastic. I remember the neighbor kids getting one and my brother and I being fascinated. We wanted one too.

And per usual our parents said – well, maybe Santa will bring you one for Christmas, but you have to be good and do your chores and eat your vegetables. And we promised to be good and do our chores and eat our vegetables. And whether or not we actually were good, did our chores, and ate our vegetables is up for debate, but Santa came through that year and we got skate board! Hooray!

Initially, we were really careful with them. We didn't do anything crazy. If the driveway was too steep, we sat down on our boards and rode them down, but the more comfortable we got, the more daring we got as well. Come Spring, we were riding down our driveway standing on our feet. Quite the accomplishment.

And then, one beautiful day, when I was home without my brother for some reason, I decided I was going to ride down the steep driveway up the block, on my feet!

So, I took the skate board to the top of our neighbor's driveway. I stepped up on top of it and I was sailing down the driveway when a rock got stuck under the wheel and I went flying. I don't even know how I landed, but I knocked the air out of me. Have you ever done that? It's scary! I couldn't catch my breath. I thought I was going to die.

I really wanted that skate board, and there I was on the ground with the wind knocked out of me.

Be careful what you wish for, you might get it. Of course I wanted the skate board, but I didn't want the wind knocked out of me. Funny how we always expect all of the fun when we wish for something, but we never realize the risk of bodily harm that can go along with it.

Be careful what you wish for, you might get it.

In today's gospel reading, that's pretty much what Jesus is telling James and John. "You guys think that want to be on my right and left. You have no idea what you are asking."

Like most of the disciples, James and John thought that Jesus would be king and they wanted to be his number 2 and 3 in command of his earthly kingdom. I'm sure they imagined it would bring them all sorts of power, prestige, privilege, and property.

But, that's not God's kingdom. That is not Jesus' glory. As we know, Jesus' glory is giving his own life for the life of all of creation.

Jesus is not a taker, but a giver. God gives us everything – everything.

So, I guess James and John think Jesus will just give them what they want, but the issue is that they don't understand what they are asking. They are asking for one thing, but Jesus knows that's not what they will receive.

Being on Jesus' right and left hand means giving up self in order to help another. That's God's glory and that's what Jesus' followers are expected to do.

St. Teresa of Avila's feast day was Friday. She is famous for saying, "Christ has no body now but yours.

No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.

Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body."

We are the crucified and resurrected body of Christ living for the sake of the world. God's love is to pour out through us.

Christianity is a place of privilege only in that we get to join in God's work here and now by caring for others as we ourselves are cared for by God. We are called to share God's good news of favor for the world in the world. It is not a secret for us to keep to ourselves so that we can "lord" it over other people.

When James and John ask to be on Jesus' right and left hand, I can only picture the cross and the two who were crucified with Jesus. I'm positive that is not what they were thinking of, and that isn't what Jesus called them into either.

Jesus didn't ask them to be crucified. Jesus asks us to follow in the way of love. Because the cross is an act of love in the midst of violence and anger.

So, as we walk through our days, we pay attention to what is happening around us and seek those places where we can enter love into a situation.

St. Francis' prayer is a really good reminder of that –

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is discord, union;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we 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.

It's not only about what we get, but what we give.

And here is some good advice from St. Teresa of Avila to go along with St. Francis' prayer if his prayer seems too daunting, "The important thing is not to think much, but to love much, and to do that which stirs us to love."

Again – the gospel is not complicated. In love, we love. It's really that simple.

It has nothing to do with winning, because it's not a competition. That's why Jesus dies on the cross. Those that killed him thought it was a competition. James and John also thought it was a competition – one they wanted to win. But, you can't compete with God's love, because it's not a competition. It's pure grace. It's a gift of love that bubbles up inside of us that can't help but flow out from us.

And so we do things that stir up love – like coming here on Sunday mornings – hearing the good news and sharing the Lord's supper with other believers. It's our weekly support group meeting that enables us to love in the world the rest of the week, because we know that we are not alone. We have God and we have one another.

As you may recall, James and John spent a lot of time with Jesus. They were with Jesus and Peter at all of the major events in Jesus' earthly time, and they were the third and fourth apostles called to follow Jesus. Peter and his brother Andrew were 1 and 2 according to Mark.

So, what did happen to James and John? How did they drink the cup that Jesus drinks? How were they baptized with Jesus' baptism?

James, the Greater, as he is called, was beheaded for his faith around the year 42, not quite 10 years after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension. He was the first of the 12 to be martyred. It is said that he converted the one who was to execute him and the two were beheaded together.

John, the beloved as he is often called, was the last to die. He lived to be around 100 years old. He lived in Ephesus and preached God's love to everyone who would hear it.

He proclaimed to all people that God loved them and that being a Christian was simple – just love others. That’s it.

And so we see through James and John that to drink Jesus’ cup and to be baptized into his baptism doesn’t mean the same thing for everyone. James died first and John died last, making them the two bookends of the original apostles.

They had different personal stories, but they had the same message of God’s love and peace for all people.

Following Jesus, James did not try to kill those who would kill him, instead he invited them into God’s loving embrace.

Following Jesus, John never stopped sharing God’s good news no matter what was happening to him, from beatings to prison. Even at 100 years old, John kept preaching God’s love and peace for the world.

You and I have joined with James and John in Christ’s ministry. We have been baptized into Jesus’ baptism and we drink the same cup every time we have Holy Communion. We are given these gifts so that the whole world will know that God loves all of creation.

No one and no thing is outside of God’s love, because Jesus took it all on in the incarnation and then took it all through death into resurrection.

The Anglican Archbishop William Temple, whose feast day is Oct. 26, he died in 1944, said, “The Church primarily exists for those who are still outside it.” The role of the Church and the role of Christians is to be apostles like James and John. To take up Jesus’ ministry of sharing the good news that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in faithful love for us.

To be Jesus’ hands, feet, and voice in the world today – that is our baptism; that is the cup that we drink which unites us to Christ.

God loves all of creation. Our ministry is to proclaim that to the whole world in our words and actions.

Thanks be to God. Amen.