

Mark 10:35-45

Once again in the Gospel of Mark, James and John and the disciples are quietly arguing about their relationship with their Teacher, Jesus. Jesus has just said they are walking towards Jerusalem and will be to be delivered into the hands of power--mocked, and even die. Instead of responding to this scary possibility, James and John run to catch up with Jesus as they are walking on the road. I am imagining that James and John are discussing how hard they have worked, how much Jesus depends on them, and what great ways they are proclaiming God's message. They definitely don't want to talk about this death stuff that Jesus is talking about--things seem to be going so well.

When Jesus asks, "What is it you want me to do for you?" they respond, acknowledging the political structures of the time for important people-- "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." They did not have to add--at a great feast, Jesus, we know you will be honored -look at you. Jesus, you continue to be so popular, feeding the hungry, healing the sick and gathering great crowds--we too want a place of honor. Are they are hoping that if they are close to Jesus' power, they will not be part of this fearful scenario which Jesus has suggested will bring death? Jesus does seem pretty powerful in all that he is able to do -even God's favored one. Jesus reminds them that first, he is human like they are and that they will share in his life--and then he reminds them that this kind of glory, power and importance is not the life they are living together.

The other disciples, running to catch up after overhearing that James and John want a special place in Jesus' powerful sphere of influence, are angry. Are they angry that James and John are asking for what they themselves wanted, or that they asked at all? Jesus, calls them all to gather around, stopping on the side of the road so they can really listen, resting a bit before he encounters the crowds again, and tries to explain that it is in serving that you become first. Loving your neighbor has to do with being a servant to others, not thinking of self, but of the other. These miracles that they have experienced with Jesus are leading them to a different kind of glory and they will all be a part of the story of this journey into Jerusalem.

Jesus and the disciples are living a prophet's life. Prophets speak the truth of God's love, and it is not about being the most important person who has power; it is about another way of living and a different way of finding meaning. Prophets speak in the voice of a compassionate God--not in the language of power and "me first" as a person of influence and prosperity. Jesus often spoke of children, reminding his disciples that serving and protecting the vulnerable and the "unseen" was the way of understanding glory.

Jesus coming to set us free from oppressive bonds, so that we can serve others was difficult to comprehend, not because the disciples are not trying to be good followers, but because the power structure is being reversed. It is not the way we usually think. Who can imagine serving the most vulnerable when currying favor with influential people can get a person ahead in life? All measures of value are being questioned, even for the fisherman who had suddenly found their own status in the Jesus' time improved as disciples. The disciples continue to follow Jesus, learning what it means to serve.

*Loving God, set me free that I may serve your people.*

*Susan +*