

Rev. Dan Welch Lent 5 3-18-18 Text-
Mark 10: 35- 45

It's not too hard to see where James and John get it wrong in this reading from Mark's Gospel. "Teacher...Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory. (Mark 10:35, 37)." But it's not just these two brothers it's the rest of the disciples, too. Every last one of them were much too concerned about honor and glory for themselves. They all wanted to be the center of attention. They all wanted those positions of prestige and privilege. To sit on the right and left were the two top spots. They would have been Jesus' favorites. Everyone else would have been looking up to them. It would be like standing on the gold medal stand in the Olympics forever. Who wouldn't want that! The two brothers thought they should have those seats. And the rest of the disciples were now triggered! They were indignant; angry that James and John asked for places they thought *they* should have. It's a pretty nasty scene of jealousy, pride, selfish ambition, and anger. But if we're honest we can relate to this scene more than we would probably care to admit. It's the same selfish, human nature we have too.

A few years ago I heard a about a church that was doing an analysis of the giving at the congregation. A chart was put on public display that divided into two columns: amount of money given on one side and number of people giving that amount on the other. The purpose was to see how many were giving little if anything. But I wonder how many of the top givers were tempted to say, "I'm doing pretty good! I wonder if anyone knows I'm one of the best givers? I wish people could see the names in each category."

Have you ever had the chance to compare yourself with someone else and see how much better you are? Pride sneaks in. You and I like that recognition, that honor. The desire for glory grabs hold. Usually it just turns out to be selfish ambition. It's nasty business.

On a very positive note, here at First Lutheran we are blessed with dozens and dozens of volunteers who do so many important things to help keep the church running smoothly. And I and many others are extremely grateful, we could not keep a church this size functioning well without your volunteer help. You *deserve* our thanks and you are greatly appreciated!

Anyway, on a less positive note, I have heard about how at one church they have a well-developed *recognition program* for their volunteers. Someone who has given a lot of time and effort to the church is chosen each year and has his or her name placed on a plaque. It's a time to give thanks for someone's service to the church. But I can imagine someone saying, "*My* name should be on that plaque. I have done so much for this church. Why is that woman recognized before me? I have done more than she has."

Have you ever had someone else receive some recognition you thought you should have received? Maybe you're the busy-bee worker quietly laboring behind the scenes and someone else gets the credit for what you have done. The envy eats at you. It gets in and spreads like a virus. The bitterness can last for years. Jealousy rears its ugly head. It's a nasty scene.

So it's not too hard to see what James and John and the rest of the

disciples did wrong. We know what pride, ambition, jealousy, anger and indignation all can do when the desire for recognition, glory, and honor wells up inside of us.

But it's also not too hard to see what James and John and all the rest did **right**. One thing stands out as **wise** and **good** in this nasty scene. They went to **Jesus**. They at least knew to go to **Jesus**.

James and John were clearly wrong for wanting to be above the other disciples. But when Jesus asked them if they would suffer with Him, they said, "Yes." They wanted to be with Jesus. They wanted to follow Him even if that meant rejection, persecution, and death. James was put to death for His faith; beheaded. John was exiled to the Island of Patmos for the last years of his life. That's where he wrote the book of Revelation. James and John wanted to follow Jesus no matter the cost.

The other disciples- their anger and indignation were wrong. They were jealous and wanted the places of honor for themselves. But they were following Jesus. They wanted to be the ones closest to Him. They knew He was special, and being next to Him was the best place to be. They were right. Jesus was the One to ask. Being close to Him is the best place in the world. Following Him is a good desire to have. But not for glory and honor. Not for recognition and special awards. But for service. For greatness that comes from serving.

Remember what Jesus said? "I have come not to be served, but to serve." Now **that's** greatness. It's great for us. Watch how He does just what He says. Jesus gives up the fullness of His greatness to come to this earth. He gives up His heavenly honor and glory to serve us in

suffering and death. He doesn't choose some powerful country with a mighty army and overwhelming weapons. He comes to a tiny country called Israel. Look at a map of the world. You can see huge countries. Then there's Israel. You can barely see it. Yet when Jesus walks this earth, it's the center of the universe. All of creation is looking at Him for the greatest service to be done.

Again, the place seems so ironic for such greatness. We call it **Mount** Calvary, but it was probably no more than a small mound, a little knoll where criminals were crucified. Yet on that tiny spot of land, Jesus did what we could never do. He took all our pride and jealousy, every nasty scene, and buried it from God's sight once and for all. In its place He gives us all His love and forgiveness, a wonderful scene of eternal life. God Himself glorified and honored His Son. He brought Jesus out of the grave in joyful recognition that Jesus' service to us is true greatness.

Just like James and John and the other disciples, we want to be close to Jesus. And **that's** why we've come here today and every Sunday and even for special services during the week. Jesus is here for us in His Word and Sacraments. He's here in the Divine Service to **serve** us the forgiveness, life, salvation, and strength that we need for this world and the next and which He went to Mt. Calvary to win for us. He is the One to go to. He is the One to trust. He grants our requests. Yes, He is the One to follow- in service not selfish ambition, in humility not pride, in love not jealousy.

Have you ever wondered who will sit on Jesus' right and left sides? Who will receive that honor? Will it be James and

John? The case could be made for Moses or King David. Peter was the lead disciple. But Mary Magdalene was the first to see Him risen from the dead. Could it be Jesus' mother? The apostle Paul? John the Baptist? We don't know yet. But we do know what the people who will sit in those places will look like.

A child holding tight all the change from a piggy bank, but then dropping it in the offering plate with a smile, not caring if everyone has noticed. Just giving freely. A woman cleans up a mess that's been left in the church kitchen. No one else is around, but that's okay as she's singing a hymn of praise for Jesus.

A man sees some weeds have popped up around the church grounds and takes time out of his day to pull them up. He is serving Jesus and church.

A mom brings her children to church so they will be closer to Jesus. And many years later, the children lovingly bring her to church when she cannot drive anymore, keeping her close to Jesus.

A dad prays with the kids, reading them Jesus stories so they know Whom to ask for their deepest needs. Then he keeps praying for them as they leave home to live their own lives.

A husband cares for his wife as her health fails. A wife doesn't give up encouraging her husband in his faith.

Who will sit on Jesus' right and left sides in heaven? I don't know, but what honor will go to those who have served in love because they wanted to be close to Jesus, they wanted others to be close to Jesus.

Who will receive that greatest honor? I don't know, but when we find out on that last day, we will not be jealous. We will simply be rejoicing that

we too are close to Jesus- all because He chose to serve us instead of choosing to be served on that little hill called Mt. Calvary.
Amen.