

## **Mark 10:32-52**

<sup>32</sup>They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, <sup>33</sup>saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; <sup>34</sup>they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again." <sup>35</sup>James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." <sup>36</sup>And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" <sup>37</sup>And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." <sup>38</sup>But Jesus said to them, "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?" <sup>39</sup>They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; <sup>40</sup>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." <sup>41</sup>When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John.<sup>42</sup> So Jesus called them and said to them, "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. <sup>43</sup>But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup>and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup>For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." <sup>46</sup>They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. <sup>47</sup>When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" <sup>48</sup>Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" <sup>49</sup>Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." <sup>50</sup>So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. <sup>51</sup>Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." <sup>52</sup>Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

## **Sermon – Mark 10:32-52**

What do you want me to do for you? That's a question we hear Jesus ask multiple times in our scripture that Loy just read for us today. It comes right after the scripture from last week that Trish Beckman preached on: the one where Jesus hugs a rich man who asks what he needs to do to inherit eternal life before giving the rich man the hard news that he must give away his money. Or as we modern readers may hear it, untangle ourselves from systems of oppression.

Our scripture today opens with Jesus giving the disciples some hard news. He has decided to head towards Jerusalem. Thus far in his ministry, Jesus has upset the religious establishment and shaken the rulers of the day, but he has done it safely from the countryside surrounded by crowds of people until now.

This is a turning point. Jesus has decided that he will meet the rulers and leaders of the establishment on their own turf—in Jerusalem—and it's not going to be good. So he tells the disciples, his 12 closest friends, that things are going to get rough from here on. He predicts being arrested, tortured, and then his own death. This isn't the first time he's brought it up, but it's the first time he's mentioned it while also heading toward Jerusalem, which makes it real. Jesus also predicts that death will not hold him, but that piece is lost on the disciples. The enormity of it all is just too much.

So they're on the road headed towards Jerusalem. Jesus is leading the way, with the disciples trying to wrap their heads around what he has told them so they're following slowly behind. They're not sure if they want to go with him.... Except for the sons of Zebedee.

If we looked back to the very beginning of Mark's gospel, the sons of Zebedee, James and John, are two of the first of Jesus' followers. When Jesus calls them as disciples, they jump from the fishing boat they are in with their father, dropping their nets to follow Jesus.

Now they're near the end of Jesus's ministry, but for some reason they are not in the "somber shadow" that the rest of the disciples are after hearing Jesus foretell his own arrest, suffering and death. Instead, in an insensitive, horribly planned move, they run up alongside Jesus to discuss their agenda. "We want you to do us a favor," they say, "we've been waiting to ask you this for a long time." Probably also lost in his own thoughts, we hear Jesus ask this question for the first time: "What is it you want me to do for you?" "Well, we know that you are setting up a kingdom," and when it happens, we want to be your top advisers, your right *and* left hand men."

Why James and John are guessing that Jesus is planning to rule a kingdom—and all of a sudden for the first time, rank his friends from favorite to least favorite—I don't know. But it certainly goes along with the theme in Mark's gospel of the disciples not getting what Jesus was about. In light of the heavy news that Jesus has just shared with them, their timing and lack of tact may seem shocking. "How could they have been so insensitive?" we might wonder. "How could they have been thinking about themselves when Jesus just told them that he was going face-to-face with the authorities in Jerusalem?"

We may not be able to imagine ourselves in their position, but I imagine at one time or another, each of us has sought power and privilege when we had it in our sights, or at least thought we did. As another preacher said, "There's a little bit of the Kardashians in all of us." It's somehow human to occasionally let our egos run wild, seeking to pull ahead of the crowd. We certainly see it in our world all of the time.

Reverend Peter Storey is a Methodist minister from South Africa who bravely fought against the apartheid regime for decades—beginning in the 1960s—with people like Desmond Tutu. Rev. Storey tells about his coming to the United States to teach as a professor at Duke University. He says, "when I gave out my first grades—my students had written an essay for me—and I had graded their essays. I had a whole lot of complaints. One of them said, 'I've always been an A student. I've never seen a B, never mind a B minus.' 'Well,' he told the student, 'welcome to the alphabet. The next is C, and it goes down from there.'

When he met with the class again, he said, 'I'm puzzled. It seems to me that in your education you've been taught the doctrine of original wisdom. Well I come from another place where we start with the doctrine of original ignorance and we move from there.' Following that exchange, he said, the students soon got used to it and appreciated it. 'They were no longer in an atmosphere,' he said, 'where a teacher was afraid to make them realize they weren't quite up to standard yet.'<sup>1</sup>

And that, perhaps, is what Jesus was trying to tell James and John. They thought they were getting A's, but when they ask to sit at Jesus' right and left hand, they found out that he's handing out B minuses. "Can you drink the cup that I drink?" Jesus asks them, after their staggering display of arrogance and poor timing. "Can you receive the baptism that I do? Do you even know what you're asking? Because this isn't about privilege or power, it's a different kind of leadership, and it's not about accolades, it's about serving." James and John, maybe not even comprehending what Jesus said, quickly replied that "of course they could drink the cup he will drink. Accept the baptism Jesus did." But they still didn't get it.

When the other disciples heard what James and John had done—making a play for greatness—they were angry, and James and John were quickly humbled. Perhaps James' and

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Storey, Sermon from October 28, 2018, Cape Town, South Africa. I am indebted to Rev. Storey for this story and his wisdom in general around this scripture.

John's mistake was that they took what they knew of the kingdoms, leaders and tyrants of the day, and they translated it to thinking that Jesus' realm would somehow be like those.

Instead, Jesus was saying, "do you want to be great? Then think of others. Start there." James and John took what they thought they knew about kingdoms, and brought it to class with them and thinking there was no need to study. They forgot that Jesus didn't come to be served, he came to serve. They didn't consider that they might have more to learn.

And Jesus, in his graciousness, is still willing to work with them. You see in the very next part, as Jesus and the disciples continue walking, they hear someone shouting for Jesus. It's a man named Bartimaeus, who's vision is impaired and is begging on the street. The disciples—who don't get it, remember—try to silence Bartimaeus. He seems like nuisance—he's in the way—they think. But knowing that this was his chance, Bartimeaus won't stop using his voice to draw Jesus' attention.

So Jesus invites the disciples to practice what he's preaching and tells the disciples, "bring Bartimaeus to me. You do it," Jesus says, engaging the disciples into the work of care for others. It was hands-on learning. So the disciples say, "Bartimaeus, get up, take heart, he's calling you!"

Then Jesus asks the question that echoes from before. The same question he asked James and John when they were jockeying for the best positions: "What do you want me to do for you?" Now when we hear this question repeated, *we know* these stories are connected. (But as an aside, I love that Jesus asks Bartimeaus what it is that he wants, rather than assuming that he knows what Bartimaeus is asking.) Bartimaeus tells Jesus, "I'd like to regain my sight. I don't need to be first, or ranked at all. I'd just like to feel whole again. That's enough."

Do you see? Jesus is saying to his disciples. Bartimeaus didn't want power or privilege. He was just seeking healing. He just wanted to feel whole. And in as much as Jesus' healing was for Bartimaeus in this story, it was just as much so for James and John. They're invited to find healing by looking outside themselves and their visions of grandeur to find a much deeper sense of wholeness. Healing, after all, takes place in a whole community. It is rarely just one person in a group who is healed.

After being made well, Jesus tells Bartimeaus to go. But he doesn't. Instead of going on with his life, Bartimaeus turns and follows Jesus down the road toward Jerusalem too.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asks. That one question, asked two different times in very different contexts, and with very different agendas, is meant to be a contrast. *Not* for the sake of shaming James and John, but perhaps to highlight what Jesus is about. It is to say, perhaps, that God's heart is with people who get up and cry out for healing and wholeness rather than greatness and power, because we all need healing and wholeness, no matter who we are, or who we think we are.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asks. What would our own answer be if Jesus asked us the same question? Though we might initially long or at least compete in some way to be first or best, perhaps the more honest versions of ourselves are just longing to be whole. And longing for the world to be whole.

Jesus turns his face toward Jerusalem not for the first-place, well-educated, successful selves we present to the world. Rather, Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem for the ones who just don't get it, for the ones who get B minuses and the rest of the letters down from there. For the cracked and hurting selves we may hide but who long for help, and wholeness, and just to be heard and seen. May we follow Jesus, James, John, and Bartimaeus, to find healing

ourselves. And may we follow them not just for ourselves, but to be guided by the Spirit to hear others who long for healing and wholeness too. Amen.