

*Gracious and loving God
You call us to be stewards of your
Abundance, the caretakers of all you have entrusted to us
Help us always to use your gifts wisely
And teach us to share them generously
Send the Holy Spirit to work through us
Bringing your message to those we serve
May our faithful stewardship bear
Witness to the love of Jesus Christ in our lives
Refresh us so that we may honor his great name.
Amen.*

Good morning! Good morning at home!

You know, you have to hand it to the Sons of Zebedee. It's refreshing to see someone in Jesus' nearer orbit strike out so spectacularly hard. Well, besides Peter anyway. And you'd think they'd have softened their approach after what they'd heard from Jesus just before they talked to Jesus about occupying the right hand position in his exaltation. Just in the tenth chapter of Mark which preceded today's lesson, he'd taught people against hardness of heart in family relationships and he'd just said that defenseless and weak children were ripe for the Kingdom of God. He'd let them know that wealth in itself was no guarantor for entry into the Kingdom. You'd hope that the folks closest to him would be starting to get their hearts and heads around the "not of this world" aspect of the

dawning of God's Kingdom, inaugurating right in front of them in the ministry of Jesus.

But no. The Brothers Zebedee, Peter, the rest of the disciples still have some room to grow, and entire ministry of the Messiah was yet to unfurl. Jesus called James and John "Sons of Thunder" back in the third chapter of Mark's account of the Gospel, and we tend to think that's because they were give to being boisterous and impetuous. So I guess their rather abrupt request in today's lesson tracks. It also tracks with what the folks around Jesus were expecting for Israel's Messiah. They were thinking in terms of the line of David, of a conquering King who would make those Romans pay for all of that burdensome taxation, violent occupation, and Caesar-centric idolatry.

So when the Zebedees ask to sit at the right and left of Christ in his glory, they are almost completely clueless as to what Christ's glorification actually entails. They were expecting an honored place in his royal court, a place of power and influence where they'd get to call the shots. They probably expected to Jesus to rule like David did, from a palace with armies and the spoils of conquest. Sure,

there was a whole thing about covenant-faithfulness with Israel's God, but you know, sitting at Jesus' right and left hand would be really cool with all the swords, and feasts, and money, and fame to throw around.

I imagine a wry smile on Jesus' face when he responded to their request. "You don't know what you're asking," he said to them. The, glory, the exaltation coming his way, the "baptism" he referenced, was not about courts, palaces, and all the trappings of earthly power. Rather, his exaltation would be about a cross and passion. As Hebrews put it this morning:

Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him...

Jesus' exaltation would be a complete reversal of the Zebedee's expectation, and really everyone's expectations. And as the disciples, and indeed Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth would find, the court of Jesus would be as King of the Entire Universe, not just the part in which he was born and ministered.

Of course, after Jesus spoke with the Brothers, the disciples dogpiled. They had every right to be upset, honestly, I mean it was a pretty bald power grab right in front of the rest of them. But Jesus had more to say. In Christ's Kingdom, power comes from service. He would summarize his entire ministry by saying: "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Beloved, we serve a King who served and suffered for us. We can almost laugh at how off the mark the Brothers Zebedee were, but if we're really honest about it, we too can miss that to serve Christ in his church is to do so with humility. I've noticed I'm at my best when whatever gifts or talents God has given me are leveraged for the service of others and the edification of His people. When I work as hard as I can so that everyone knows what meagre talents I have, that's when I've gotten into the most trouble in my heart, soul, mind, and strength. Put another way, things are just better when I seek not to exalt my frustratingly easy to misspell name, but rather to glorify the Most Holy Name of Jesus. After all, even as Jesus was teaching his disciples about Christian humility and servant leadership he was showing that those things work because God was and is in charge

all along. So, dear ones, let us serve one another in the knowledge that God is indeed in charge, ever mindful of His promise to each and every one us in the Psalter:

Because [they are] bound to me in love,
therefore will I deliver them; *

I will protect [them], because [they] know my Name.

[They] shall call upon me, and I will answer [them]; *

I am with [them] in trouble;

I will rescue [them] and bring [them] to honor.

To Him be all Glory; from age to age. Amen.