

## Mark 10:35-45

Jesus is so gentle with his disciples. And they can be so dense.

One of the characteristics of Mark's gospel is that, right up until the resurrection, the disciples just don't get it. They play the role of the straight man in Mark's gospel. Jesus says, "Kingdom of God," and the disciples (including many of his modern disciples) think, "Hmmm, Like the Roman Empire, only, with Jesus on the throne." Jesus says, speaking of his crucifixion, "I will be glorified," and the disciples hear, "Glorification? Oh, there's going to be a parade and trumpets and a big coronation!"

Today's gospel reading is a case in point. To set the scene: Jesus is leading his followers towards Jerusalem, towards his crucifixion walking right out in front. As they are walking Jesus gathers the twelve around him and tells them (for the third time in Mark's gospel): "We are going up to Jerusalem, and I will be betrayed . . . They will condemn me and hand me over to the Gentiles, who will humiliate me and kill me. Three days later, I will rise."

That's the moment when James and John catch up with Jesus, pull him aside and — still thinking, "Roman Empire"

-- say, "Teacher, we want you to grant us a favor . . . . we want to sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in your glory."

Jesus has just told them that he's about to be crucified.

I'm surprised that I've never seen an icon of my Lord slapping his hand to his forehead. He's spent his entire ministry teaching and modeling being a servant and healer, and these two want to be princes. He's just finished talking about his own looming crucifixion. . . and these two are concerned about getting seats at the head of the table! Had they not been listening?

You would think, knowing, as Jesus does, that he is walking towards his own death, he might, at this point, be just a little short with his uncomprehending disciples. But he's not. He understands that they don't understand, and he is very gentle with them. Jesus turns and asks them "Are you able to drink the cup that I must drink, or be baptized in the experience in which I am about to be immersed?"

"Oh sure," they say, "we can do that!"

Well, they can't. They think they can; but they can't.

When it all hits the fan in Jerusalem, James and John couldn't bear to look at the cup of bitterness and violence that Jesus was drinking, much less share his "baptism" on the cross. They ran away. They hid.

Now later, after the Resurrection, and after the coming of the Holy Spirit, they began to understand that the Christ they knew in Jesus was eternal, that the world could not kill it, and that this same Eternal Christ had come to dwell in them as well. This inner connection to the Eternal, the gift of the Holy Spirit, gives us courage even in the face of death.

The historical proof of this is, almost all of the twelve apostles wound up being killed in witness to their faith. Eventually, they did get it; they did drink the cup; they did share in Jesus' baptism. But at this point of the story, they had not yet experienced the powerlessness of Rome in the face of the Resurrected Jesus, and they had not yet received God's own Holy Spirit as their own; and so, when push came to shove, they ran away.

When Jesus asked them, "Can you drink this cup? Can you share this baptism?", he knew they were not ready -- yet. But he wasn't upset about it because he also knew that, someday, they would be ready. "Someday," says

Jesus, “you will be able to drink this cup and share this baptism.”

It’s the spiritual equivalent of a parent watching a child learn how to walk; a child will stumble many times before it becomes sure-footed. A good parent does not begrudge or belittle a child for stumbling while it’s learning how to walk. That’s how Jesus treats James and John when they say and do stupid things — which they do a lot in Mark’s gospel. But that is also the patience God shows to us when we fall short.

Every Friday morning, the Daily Office includes this collect:

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

“. . . that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace.”

Even though we, like James and John, often don’t get it, the Christian life is a life of service to others and sacrifice to God. We sacrifice our lives to one another, sometimes

even for one another. We consecrate our time, our talent, and our wealth for the privilege of sharing Christ's mission of reconciling the world to its Creator. It is a privilege: We don't sacrifice in order to suffer; we sacrifice for the sake of joy and blessing and for the opportunity to plant the seeds of joy and blessing. We walk in the way of the cross because we *do* eventually learn from experience that it is the way of life and peace.

This is a truth of everyday life and Jesus lifts it up as a virtue to be emulated. Good parents routinely sacrifice their personal desires and ambitions for the sake of their children and they find great satisfaction in doing so, not that it's always fun or even pleasant. God built the capacity for compassion into our nature, and Jesus knows that we humans are at our best when let our God-given compassion for others outweigh our fears and desires for ourselves.

"Are you able to drink this cup?" "Well, give me sip."  
That's how it starts. And then, the next time the cup comes around -- or the chalice -- we want to taste it more deeply because it brings peace.

It's a spiritual law: The more you give, the more you have to give. I'm not talking about money here -- give away all

your money and you'll be poor. I'm talking about love: The more you give, the more you have to give. Now, sometimes love is shown by giving money (I hope we'll see a lot of love shown in just that way during our stewardship campaign). But giving love is about sharing ourselves, what Julianne Parker used to call "with-ness." Although it may look like sacrifice from the outside, what it feels like on the inside is the certainty that we've found the way, and we are walking in the way of life and peace.

Like James and John, it's not immediately clear to most of us that the way of the cross, the way of sacrifice, is the path through which we find fulfillment in life. But Jesus is patient with us. He knows that we will eventually get it. Because the Christian life is not the result of a moment of conversion. The Christian life is a life of ongoing and constant conversion.

So what does this all mean for us? It means that the way of the cross is not a path of personal ambition, but only and always a path of service: Service to God, service to our families, service to our neighbors (neighbors of all races, religions and political affiliations, by the way, for they are all children of God) service to our nation, and service to the world. Our glory is not to be found in our power or position; our glory is perfected in service,

wherever we find ourselves and whatever we happen to be doing. So it should be.

God is above and in and through all things. Serve Him there.