

Friday, March 31, 2023
Season of Lent
Day 33

Matthew 20:20–28

²⁰ Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favour of him.

²¹ "What is it you want?" he asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

²² "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

"We can," they answered.

²³ Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

²⁴ When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. ²⁵ Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Reflection

There is something deeply ironic happening in this passage. Namely, a mother is trying to secure position and power for her sons. We couldn't call her innocent, but by no means is she evil. She's just playing the game according to the rules of the world. She tries to get Jesus to give his word before knowing what's being asked. She's determined to get to Jesus first so her sons will have the strongest secondary positions in the coming kingdom.

Jesus means what he says: "you have no idea what you're asking." She thinks she's asking for security for her sons but she's actually asking for their deaths. Fortunately for her the Father has already selected people to be enthroned on Jesus's left and right—his cross will be the one in the centre. While these boys will be killed for the gospel, they will not occupy those particular crosses. We can imagine her relief when her sons are not crucified with their Lord. Thank God we don't get everything for which we ask!

Of course, all this is veiled under the same lack of understanding the disciples have around Jesus's declaration of his own death. So, when the rest of the group hears that these two tried to make an end run for power positions, they are upset. Clearly they are better candidates for power positions, right? So, Jesus must clarify AGAIN the nature of the kingdom. In your group (the church) there will not be a pagan-like hierarchy of power. There will be those with authority (and these 12 form its backbone) but the nature of that leadership is slave not ruler. Those in authority must lay down their lives like their Lord for the ransom (the purchase price of slaves) of many.

The season of Lent is the training for this laying down of our lives. By faithfully letting go of the small things and the easier things, we are being formed to give up the greatest thing; our life. We too are tempted by power. May God make us strong enough to drink the cup and embrace our cross.

Prayer

Lord, forgive us for the moments when we want privilege and prestige. Develop in us instead a hunger and thirst for service and sacrifice. Amen.