

*James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to Jesus and said to him,*

*“Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”*

*And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?”*

*And they said to him, “Appoint us to sit,*

*one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”*

*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?”*

*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,*

*but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to appoint,*

*but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”*

*When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John.*

*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.*

*But it is not so among you; instead, whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.”*

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Along with Peter,

James and John belong to the inner circle.

Perhaps it was that distinction

that emboldened them to request a *carte blanche*.

They want to REVERSE the order Jesus had previously insisted on. Mark 8.33

They want Jesus to THEIR will rather THEY doing JESUS' will.

But they prefaced this request by calling Jesus Teacher –

and a teacher is always intent on uncovering the hearts of disciples.

Nothing uncovers the heart like voicing desire.

The first desire made it clear that they are fixated on themselves and are in hot pursuit of something else.

So without answering their question,

Jesus inquires about what they want.

Their question has been answered with a question.

The teacher has turned the tables.

These two sons of Zebedee want to flank Jesus in glory.  
Was the image of the Transfiguration  
with Elijah and Moses on either side of Jesus their model –  
it just took place in the last chapter! Mark 9.4  
What is in their hearts are prestige and power,  
and Jesus is the star to which they have hitched this aspiration.  
As soon as Jesus hears what they want,  
he KNOWS they do not know –  
he is the wrong star for glory hounds!

What Jesus knows is a process:  
a cup of sorrow that becomes a cup of salvation –  
a baptism that is both death and resurrection.  
This definitely refers to Jesus' upcoming passion and resurrection.  
But it also means the way of life Jesus advocates:  
denying yourself,  
taking up your cross,  
and losing your life for the sake of the Gospel  
and in service of others.  
Death and resurrection come as a package.  
Also, the attitude should not be  
bearing with bad times  
in order to get to good times.  
Dying and rising  
are two sides of the one experience of life and freedom.  
James and John do not hesitate.  
But have they grasped the significant way Jesus has changed their desire?  
Since they have agreed to the cup and the baptism,  
Jesus can grant THIS request.  
Anyone who follows Jesus can be sure the pattern of his life  
will be the pattern of theirs.  
It may not be the exact same conflict that Jesus precipitated,  
yet the path will be death and resurrection  
and NOT an endless upward escalator to glory.  
Their original request cannot be granted.  
Jesus does not control everything.  
Jesus follows the will of God  
and trusts that God's plan will be fulfilled  
in the way God desires it.

What a frustrated ending to their grab for glory.  
They get the cross and resurrection!  
But the right and left hand places are not in Jesus' gift.

So the goal that drives them  
can no longer be this form of aggrandizement.

The Gospel according to Mark stresses that putting OTHERS first  
entails denying ourselves and taking up the cross.

“Denying yourself” points to what we will have to give up  
in order to serve others.

Often these things are the things that make us feel secure  
in the social world: status and wealth.

Although denying yourself  
certainly involves an interior attitude of detachment,  
it also means some degree of actual relinquishment.

“Taking up your cross” points to all the persecution we will receive  
as we engage a life of putting others first,  
because it’s so counter-cultural.

Our service to others is not a subservient “whatever you want.”  
James and John may have got this impression from Jesus,  
and so they bluntly asked him to fulfill their fantasies.  
Jesus makes it clear that he is NOT available for THAT project.  
Neither are we.

Service means discerning the lure of God in the life of others  
and committing ourselves to their response.

This commitment may bring us into conflict with people  
who are invested in maintaining oppressive structure.

So in order to be faithful to service, we will have to take up our cross.

There is great joy in fashioning a new humanity, a Spirit-filled humanity.