

**Worship Service for October 17<sup>th</sup>:** 21st Sunday after Pentecost

- **Old Testament:** Isaiah 53:4-12
- **New Testament:** Mark 10:35-45
- **Psalms:** Psalm 91:9-16

**Announcements:**

- Wednesday November 3<sup>rd</sup>: Bible Studies Acts 1 in St. George's P. C at 7pm.

**Sermon Title: Seeking God's Glory!**

In this week's gospel, we encounter two brothers, James and John the sons of Zebedee coming to Jesus with a very ambitious request. Once again, we see a familiar scene playing before us. Before their request, Jesus was just from telling them that as they were going into Jerusalem he would be killed by the people. And once again, this announcement seems to stir up the wrong emotions in Jesus' disciples. If we remember very well, a few Sundays ago, Jesus had announced his impending death to his disciples, and they started arguing among themselves about who was the greatest among them. This time around, after announcing that he would be seized and killed by the people, James and John saw it as an opportunity to tender their request to Jesus. We have no idea if it was something that they had been contemplating and just waiting for the right opportunity or if the idea came only after Jesus' announcement. Whatever provoked their request, it is clear that it was super ambitious and audacious, but not in a good way.

What was their request? That Jesus would permit them to sit at his right and left hand in his glory. As always Jesus exercises so much patience with his disciples and takes time to respond to them and school them about a few things concerning God's Kingdom. Anyone would be appalled by their request but not Jesus. And he calmly takes time to explain to them what God's glory was all about. Jesus engages in a conversation with these two disciples which is one of compassion and not of condemnation. He didn't react like the other disciples who got angry when they heard what had happened. Even though their request and motives were wrong, at least we can commend them for coming to the right place to get their requests met. Instead of criticizing James and John, Jesus redirects their striving, offering them a better solution on how to acquire greatness and see God's glory.

Do we as Christians seek God's glory? Do we have the boldness to come to Jesus with our requests and ambitions no matter how wrong they may be? Jesus told us

last week to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. That is what James and John were supposed to be pursuing.

God is ready to work with our desires and ambitions and is ready to correct them if they are wrong and lead us to the right desires. He wants us to desire more, seek more and hope more. What is harmful in our spiritual life is not the fact that we are ambitious but the fact that that ambition is a greedy and selfish one. It is all about us and what will profit us. However, desires can be redirected. Ambitions can be purified. But my unwillingness to care, my numbness of soul, my reluctance to hope because I fear disappointment. These are the dead ends. These are the roadblocks to abundant grace and transformation.

Jesus Christ is a clear example to his disciples of what to be and strive for. Instead of striving for himself, Jesus was striving for others, leaving his throne in heaven and coming to earth as a human, as a slave to take away all our sins and die on the cross. He was striving to bring glory to God and not to himself.

At least James and John *ask*. They approach Jesus boldly and make their request known with hearts full of confidence. Is the request greedy? Yes. Is it borne of ignorance and immaturity? Yes. Are some of the motives behind the request selfish? Yes. *And yet*. They ask. They engage in real relationship and conversation with Jesus and express an authentic desire to remain close to him.

As we reflect on this, let's begin to ask ourselves how often we don't ask, don't engage, and don't lean. How often we go through our days as if God doesn't really exist, *even as* we profess to be God's children, God's followers, God's friends. Real relationships require honest engagement. They require love, affection, and an ongoing desire for proximity and intimacy. James and John exemplify all of these traits in their friendship with Jesus, and we would do well to follow in their footsteps. After all, they aren't simply disciples; they're members of Jesus's beloved inner circle. Jesus allows them — along with Peter — to witness many things the other disciples don't. There's something about their unguarded approach and demeanor that Jesus cherishes because it creates a teaching opportunity for Jesus and a learning opportunity for his disciples.

Although going to meet Jesus and making their request was the right thing to do, they made a very big mistake and that's where the heart of this week's Gospel

lies. The easiest way to describe their error is to contrast the demand they make of Jesus with the question Jesus asks them in return. They come to Jesus with such audacity requesting that he does whatever they ask of him. As if to say they were fully conscious that their request was very wrong. They came with an air of entitlement, as if to say we have a right to this blessing because we have been with you all through your ministry and we deserve some compensation.

James and John did not understand that service was not a means to an end. For Jesus service was sacrifice, it was seeking God's glory over our own personal gain and vain glory. Jesus made it clear to them through his response that in the Kingdom of God service *is* the end. Service is abundance. Service is power. Service is glory. "Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first must be slave of all."

In God's Kingdom in order to succeed you have to offer your all without expecting anything in return. God's Kingdom is not the place to come and seek for privilege and prestige. Glory in God's kingdom is acquired by going downward not upward, by being a servant and not a leader. And the Rabbi teaches by example as he leaves his throne to come and die poor. Even his birth was nothing to write home about. It happened in a stable. He made sure that he stripped himself of all glory and handed it to God the Father. And even when his human nature became afraid of death, he still reminded himself that it was not his will but the will of God that he had to submit to.

What lessons are we learning so far from Jesus and his humility and selflessness? That even when his disciples make mistakes over and over again, he doesn't criticize them but always responds in love and compassion. That even though he was God, he chose to do the humblest things, washing the feet of his disciples, traveling on a donkey and dying the death of a common criminal in order that we might inherit salvation and eternal life.

Are we truly seeking God's glory as we serve him or are we seeking our own vain glory in order to gain the praises of men? It is time for us to lean on Jesus, it is time for us to come to him with our requests no matter how wrong and selfish and give him the chance to correct those errors. It is time for us to submit to the power of the Holy Spirit and let him transform us and teach us how to truly seek God's glory. Let us come to our Father and Saviour and learn selflessness and true humility.

## **Prayer**

God of each and every life, You open our eyes on the world you love to show us your presence and your purpose in all creation. We thank you for the wonders of the seasons as they change, and for gifts of love and compassion you offer us through friend and stranger. We pray for the earth as it struggles to support your many creatures. Make us better stewards in creation, and kinder neighbours to both friend and stranger.

Jesus, Friend and Saviour, we confess that all too often we ourselves making inappropriate requests like James and John and we need to hear you speak these words about the true meaning of greatness directly to us. Unclog our ears and tenderise our hearts so that your words enliven our discipleship; so that we put the needs of others before our own needs; so that we share what we have rather than hoarding it for ourselves and use our gifts to benefit others rather than increasing our own status and position.

Lord Jesus Christ, keep reminding us that following you means emptying ourselves of all self-serving power and filling ourselves with the desire to serve others as willingly as you did. Forgive any reluctance on our part to follow your example; replace any selfish power-plays of ours with your inclusive love, your compassion, and your humility.

God of justice, You open our eyes on the world to show us struggle and conflict. We see the burdens many are carrying, and the way differences create division. We pray for all those still struggling with the economic impact of the pandemic and for those feeling the stress of these days in deeply personal ways. Show us how to support those in difficulty and mend relationships in our community.

God of compassion, You open our eyes on the world to show us suffering and despair. We see challenges for health care all around us and know many still face the effects of COVID-19 or other illnesses and complications that make life hard to cope with. We pray for those who suffer here and in so many places in the world you love. Give strength and compassion to all who offer treatment, and courage and hope to all who wait for healing.

God of wisdom, You open our eyes on the world to show us its complexities. We see countries locked in old animosities and communities overwhelmed by fresh upheaval. We pray for the millions displaced in current conflicts and by natural disasters, and for leaders here and around the world. Open their eyes to the

suffering of the earth and those in their jurisdictions. And open all our eyes to ways we can participate in solutions to situations which break your heart and ours.

Great and gracious God, we offer you these gifts, small tokens of our love for you. Bless them with the power of your Holy Spirit so they may accomplish more than we can even imagine.

And so, we pray for your kingdom to come in the words Jesus taught us:

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

### **Benediction**

May your day be blessed by moments of quietness, light in your darkness, strength in your weakness, grace in your meekness, joy in your gladness, peace in your stillness. And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.