

Sermon For: 10/18/15

By: Catherine E. Brunson

Scripture: Job38:1-7, 34-41, Ps 104:1-9,25,37b, Heb 5:1-10, Mark 10: 35-45

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen
(Please be seated.)

Good morning!

We have heard people say that there are only two sure things in life: death and taxes. But there are some other sure things. For one, you can bet that there will always be change. And there will be frequent conflict, between and within people; even within us and with people we deal with all the time. And for sure, there will always be choices to make.

James and John had conflict. They had it within themselves as they sought how to follow Jesus, and they had conflict between themselves and the other disciples, as we see in our Gospel this morning.

Now, we normally tend to think of James and John as ideals we should emulate. We idealize these sons of Zebedee because they are in the Bible, because they walked with Jesus, and because they left everything to follow Jesus. We know that they did great things for the church. In fact, they gave their lives for Christ and His church. They are among the saints of the church and so we lift them up above the ordinary person.

But we have conflict here, too, because we also know how many times they tripped up. We like to judge them for their weaknesses and for their confusion and lack of understanding. “Look at them,” we say when we read of this competition, “Why don’t they understand what Jesus is trying to tell them? Why are they competing here? Why are they seeking all the glory?”

James and John were not pure saints in their lifetime, but neither were they complete sinners and simpletons. We need to remember that they along with the other disciples were just ordinary people, who came into contact with Jesus, and that made a big difference in their lives.

James and John struggled with Jesus’ call and they also struggled with their own desires, just as you and I do. They were trying to do their best and figure things out, but it was not always easy for them. There was so much that they did not know. And so they struggled with the call from Jesus and with the voices of the world. How could they reconcile these two things?

It is significant to recognize how much like us the disciples were. William Barclay has observed, “it was with people like ourselves that Jesus set out to change the world—and did it.”

Certainly we need to realize that God works with ordinary people to get His work done. God works with individuals who have both good and bad characteristics and habits. And with those ordinary people, God makes a difference in people’s lives in the world. With such ordinary people, God builds the church and the Kingdom of Heaven.

We, like the first disciples, are all God has to work with. And we, like James and John, sometimes think we are especially deserving of extraordinary treatment and reward. We sometimes see our lives, especially if we follow Jesus, as deserving of reward and glory. So often we want to be first, and to be the best. After all, that is what the world teaches us.

And there are some who want to be first all of the time. So a big problem with following Jesus is that we are supposed to put Him first and ourselves last. And some may wonder: where is the glory in that?

We tend to measure our success by winning, by being at the top, by gaining recognition, by being popular or making money. We like the glitter at the top, the glamour of attention and accomplishment and the glory of having made it. And sometimes that desire for glory drives us to win at all costs. And it does cost! Sometimes it costs a person everything that is really important. A person can get so caught up in being at the top that it shuts everything else out, even their concern for others, their integrity, their morals, their whole sense of right and wrong.

Henry Ford once asked one of his successful young engineers what his greatest ambition was. The engineer replied that he wanted to be very good at what he did, so good, that he would get a lot of recognition and earn the most money. He wanted to design a car that would impress his boss and everyone else. But above all else, he wanted to be very rich. “I want money,” the engineer said. “I want a big house, cars and everything money will buy!”

A couple of days later, Mr. Ford gave the young man a box containing a pair of metal-framed glasses. In place of the lenses were silver dollars. Mr. Ford told him to, "Put these on." When he did, Mr. Ford asked, "Now what do you see?" He replied, "Nothing! The money blocks everything else out." As Henry Ford walked away, he remarked, "Maybe you had better rethink your ambition!"

Jesus said it this way: "What does it profit someone to gain the whole world and lose their soul?"

There are many things that are more important than money, recognition, or being first. Not everything that is good for us is easy or brings rewards that we can see. Doing the right thing might not always get us the attention we crave. And yet, doing the right thing is what truly gives us the best rewards, in the long run.

James and John learned this in time, too. And in doing that, they found their real glory, their peace, their joy, their life. They found the glory of living in Christ, the glory of really being able to drink from Jesus' cup and be baptized with His baptism. It was the glory of being able to serve Christ, to give their all, to be faithful in all things even when it was tough. They earned the glory of succeeding in really important things, in founding the church which changed the world.

Following Jesus is not easy. It does not always seem like glory. But it will win you the respect and admiration of those people who really count, as well as a place in the Kingdom of God. It will win you the joy of Christ and eternal reward.

And if that is not enough, commitment to Jesus will give you the reward and glory of seeing lives changed, of seeing life blossom anew in some who were spiritually dead. It will give you the glory and self-respect and the priceless treasure of friendships and a new family: the family of faith in Christ's church.

It may not always seem like glory as you do difficult things, especially for those who have had some tough breaks in life. Where is the glory of sacrificing time and energy for others and the church or the glory of spending hours a week in prayer? On the other hand, where is the glory of belonging to Christ and not giving yourself to Him? Where is the glory of saying yes to Jesus, and then not doing the things He wants you to do?

Let us take our cue from Jesus. He told His disciples, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and give His life as a ransom for many." And that is the life He calls us to.

Jesus calls us to give ourselves to Him and, taking our baptism seriously, to serve rather than seek to be served. He asks us to drink from His cup of humility and compassion and to care about the salvation and well-being of others. When you do these things, you will know the glory, for you will do

them for the glory of Christ, and you will feel the deepest satisfaction in your soul.

You and I have opportunities every day to reach out to others, to invite the unchurched, to give of ourselves to friends and neighbors, to help the unfortunate of the world, to feed and clothe the poor, to minister to the lost and grieving, to show someone the way to a better life and the way to faith. We have opportunities every day to make life better for someone else, to cheer them, to encourage them, to lift their spirits and to put God's love in their hearts.

By taking those opportunities, you will not just feel good, you will find the glory of the love of Christ. May God bless you in your loving and serving!

Amen!