

Jesus has left the gentle rural hills of Galilee
and is now en-route to the big city, Jerusalem.
Those who follow must wonder:
how will his radical message go over there?
Will this miracle-worker and astute teacher win over the crowds,
put the religious leaders in their place
and even topple the Roman powers?
Is glory just around the corner?
Like a contemporary opposition party,
should Jesus and his posse begin to prepare themselves
for the transition to power?

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, believe so.
They can just about touch the power and glory
that has always eluded them as a couple of ordinary fishermen.
But they are on the right side of history this time!
They are with the one who can shame the powerful
with his answers to their loaded questions,
and who can heal people with his authoritative touch.
Like a couple of politicians jockeying for a good portfolio
in a new government, they ask,
*“Lord, when you come in glory, can we sit at your side –
one on your right and one on your left?”*

Just prior to this question Jesus had spoken frankly
for the third time about what really awaits him at Jerusalem –
that he will be handed over to the authorities, condemned,
mocked, spat upon, flogged, and killed - before rising again.
It is not that he was revealing a pre-destined plan
that now simply had to unfold;
it is more that he was outlining the natural consequences
of a life lived in love and service to others.

And each time Jesus has spoken this way about his future
the disciples respond inappropriately;
as though they are completely deaf to his words.
The first time, Peter takes Jesus aside and counsels him,
“No this will never happen to you.”
The second time, it is followed by the disciples arguing
about which of them is the greatest.
And now this third time,
it is followed by 2 disciples seeking personal glory.
In arranging his gospel,

Mark makes it clear, *the disciples just don't get it.*

And perhaps he is emphasizing that because, often, neither do we.

We can be a long time around Jesus
without really understanding him;
in Church a lifetime,
without ever truly hearing his words.
Mark seems to be addressing those
who know Jesus' acts of power and his teachings
but are light on their discipleship –
the denying of self, the serving others,
and the adjustment of values
that being a disciple necessarily entails.

In contrast to Jesus' wholehearted acceptance
of the self-denying path
James and John are seeking to shore up their own positions.
They are thinking about reputation, rank and status.
Perhaps they imagine being at Jesus' right and left
at some royal inauguration ceremony.
Maybe they see themselves as Jesus' advisors
as he deliberates from a throne of power.
But that is what they are after – greatness as the world sees it.

What do you think of when you consider greatness today?
What do you think your neighbours
imagine success to be?
I don't think it is too stereotypical to say that in our area
the size of your house,
the price of your car,
and the number of your overseas trips
still feature in many people's idea of success.
Perhaps too, the power you have over others in your job,
how well your children are doing
and the wealth you've amassed
remain as some of the modern signs of greatness.

As always, Jesus charts an alternate course
for those who would follow him,
contrasting the way of the world with the way of the disciple.
He points to the attitudes of the Gentile leaders –
probably thinking of the Roman Emperors and their delegates –
and he does so because then as now,
leaders influence the behaviour of others.
Jesus' concern is with their sense of superiority

and their reckless tyranny over the lives of others.
But disciples are not to reflect those values
or to hanker after that type of power.
Rather, to be great in the Kingdom of God
means to act as a servant of others;
indeed to take the role of a slave,
which in that first century culture
was the lowest rung on the social ladder.
So, no matter what lofty positions we reach,
or whatever titles we earn,
humility will always characterize the life of the Christian disciple.
And similarly, the habit of service will be the mark by which
we judge the greatness of others.

Actually, this emphasis on service is not new in Mark's gospel.
You recall right back in chapter 1,
when Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law,
what did she do in response?
She got up and served Jesus, acting out Christian discipleship.
And while Christ was in the wilderness, tempted by Satan,
with the wild beasts around him,
it was the angels that waited on him,
or served him at his point of need.
And Jesus will conclude this teaching by pointing to himself,
saying that "*the Son of Man did not come to **be served but to serve**
and give his life as a ransom for many.*"
Selfless service will always remain at the heart of Christian discipleship

One of the ads on TV that annoys me at the moment is the nab ad
that encourages people to talk to themselves.
*"We find that when you talk to yourself,
your goals become clearer"* or some such rot.
But there is at least some shred of truth in this statement
that we don't always know what we want in life.
It is interesting that when James and John come to Jesus
trying to trap him into agreeing to their plan,
Jesus' question is, "*What is it you want me to do for you?*"
Jesus will ask the very same question to Bartimaeus
in the following story, which we will explore next week.
In asking the question of us,
Jesus would have us be honest with ourselves.
What is it that we want?
What is it that is important to us?
Is it glory for ourselves?
Is it wholeness for our bodies and souls?
Is it wealth and comfort?

Is it a life of ease?
What is it that I most desire?

When I first came to Pymble from Katoomba
I couldn't help but notice the differences in socio economic levels
between the 2 places.

It is easy to be dazzled by the enormous and beautiful homes
that are common in this area
by the number of expensive and exotic cars driving around
(which I have to say, I quite enjoy)
and by the obvious displays of wealth.

And early on I remember asking the question of myself:

Would I want those things if I could ever afford them?

Do I covet those things deep down?

And I was pleased when I realized, actually, no,
I don't desire those things, and they do not motivate me.
But I had to ask the question honestly.

What is it you want me to do for you? says Jesus

What is your heart's desire?

Is it wealth, possessions, comfort and the world's idea of greatness
or is it service, justice, and love for others?

Let us choose afresh to follow Christ with all that that entails;
let us align our true desires with that of Jesus,
and let us confront what some had called our "Zebedee DNA"
and choose instead Christ's idea of greatness.