

**October 17, 2021. Rev. Katheryn McGinnis**

Let us pray,

Guide us, O God, by your Word, and Holy Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find freedom, and in your will discover peace; through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Our scripture reading for this morning comes from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10, verses 35 through 45. Listen now for the word of the Lord.

*35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." 36 And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" 37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." 38 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?" 39 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; 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." 41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 42 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. 43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

*The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.*

Fear is a powerful emotion. It's a universal emotion. Everyone, everywhere, at any point in human history, we have all experienced fear.

And not just humans, it's an emotion that's so basic, so primal - it's an emotion we even share with animals.

Fear causes us to do many crazy things - some good, some bad - but our actions inspired by fear, one could argue, are always driven by the need to seek security.

After fear, we want to feel safe.

After the terrorists attacks on 9/11 shocked the world - in fear that it would happen again - airport security checks drastically tightened.

Other security checks were put in place - online data gathering emerged. Cyber security tightened.

Countless school shootings have struck fear into the hearts of both teachers and students - in fear it would happen again - most schools now have metal detectors at their entrance.

While these reactions to very real and deadly fears, driven by a need to provide immediate and long lasting security to people, are in the interest of protecting nations, fear drives us to seek security in our individual lives too.

These are smaller fears, less drastic fears, but they are fears none the less.

Perhaps we all can think of a time we jumped to make a decision, maybe too quickly, because we wanted any kind of security because we were afraid.

Afraid of the unknown. Of the mystery of what comes next.

The lectionary has our scripture for today starts at verse 35 - but to truly grasp this story, we need to know what happened just before verse 35.

Immediately preceding our scripture, Jesus foretells his death and resurrection for the third time. Each time he does this, his disciples do not understand or simply reject what he says.

And each time, Jesus corrects their mistakes by teaching them about genuine discipleship.

So, in verses 32 through 34, Jesus foretells his death and resurrection.

Thus our scripture begins with the third round of the disciples clearly not getting it.

Instead of seeking to understand what it means for Jesus to die and rise from he dead - they seek power. In his realm of glory they want their 'rightful' place sitting at his left and right.

Traditional commentaries - most all commentaries, paint the disciples as foolish, ignorant, power hungry. Because it's likely true.

I mean, it is the third time they've heard this. It's hard to feel sorry for them at this point. But more recent interpretations have started to wonder - can they really be that foolish?

Can they have *really* have not understood at *all* by this point, three times later?

Maybe they did understand - at least a little.

In verse 32, right before Jesus begins to predict the passion for the third time, scripture states that the disciples were afraid.

They were afraid, and then instead of finding security, they immediately hear Jesus predict the passion for the third time.

I doubt this would do little to quell any of their fears. So, maybe they did understand - a little.

Enough to be afraid of their Lord dying and rising from the dead, but not enough to know what it meant.

Or, as Rolf Jacobson describes: “They (the disciples) see him for who he is — the Christ. But they don’t see what it means for him to be the Christ.”

They’re afraid of what it means for him to be the Christ, so what do they do next? They seek security.

They want to be assured that this man that they have followed - given up their normal lives that did provide stability and safety and security and followed him - will allow them to be with him in his glory.

They don’t know what comes next for them after he dies and rises, and this makes them afraid.

The unknown strikes fear. They don’t seem so foolish in this light. So ignorant.

For can’t we all see ourselves as they disciples: afraid of what is to come, so afraid that we demand Christ fulfill the security *we* seek, replace the unknown with the picture *we* want.

But the disciples demand to sit with Christ in his glory comes with a painful, painful irony: because the disciples picture of Christ’s glory is likely that of a grand banquet: drinking the from the same cup of Christ, feasting the same feast.

A scene of magnificent grandeur and greatness.

But Jesus’ true glory is Jesus on that cross. Being crucified. the crucifixion.

And who is ‘sitting’ next to him in this glory: two bandits, also crucified: one on his right, and one on his left.

And what is the cup he drank? A sponge filled with sour wine that someone attached to a stick and gave it to him to drink on the cross just before he breathed his last breath.

I doubt this was the security their fear sought. The throne of glory they wanted to sit next to. The cup they wanted to drink. The future they wanted. To be criminals crucified, drinking sour wine from a sponge on the cross just before you die.

The way of the Cross, Jesus’ glory, offers no certainties of security. At least the security we would like.

Only an explicit definition of what it means to be a disciple - what it means to follow this man that we know is the Christ, but that perhaps, like the disciples, our fear blinds us from seeing what it *means* for him to be the Christ. And that definition is servant leadership.

To become great enough to know and see Jesus’ glory: we must be a servant.

We must give up power, the lust for what we deem as greatness, and lower ourselves in every way to serve others.

It's explicit and clear and like the disciples, we do understand, but like the disciples, we are still afraid.

For it goes against everything our society has taught us. Everything human nature conditions us: to seek power and security.

Servant leadership is a call so radical that it cost Christ his life. But it's the only security we have to follow Christ.

We must follow in this radical call and become servants and serve, doing so without knowing what it may bring, what may come our way, what we may encounter here on this earth as Christ's true glory, where we will encounter the cross.

Mark is a short and blunt gospel: and has long been described as the gospel of the cross.

Because everything in Mark - is interpreted through the reality of what happened to Jesus on that cross. A reality shrouded in fear and mystery.

The Gospel of Mark actually has two endings. Later manuscripts have an ending tacked on and slightly different than the earliest manuscripts that scholars have found.

In later manuscripts, Christ is resurrected, appears to the women, they tell the disciples, then Jesus appears to the disciples and commissions the disciples and Jesus ascends.

The earliest manuscripts however, have Jesus crucified, the women go to the tomb, and instead of finding Jesus' body: they find a man dressed in a white robe.

He tells them that Jesus has risen and they need to go and tell his disciples. And then the Gospel of Mark ends with this verse: Mark 16:8 "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for *terror* and *amazement* had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

It ends in fear, shrouded in mystery of what will come next. with no security. Perhaps the longer ending was added on later simply because we could not sit in that fear.

We all have fear. To follow Christ, however, does not mean to have our fears of what comes next, of what it really means for Christ to be Christ, removed - but instead to embrace those fears in wonder and awe, as a sign of Christ's true glory.

A glory that comes not on our terms, but on God's terms.

Perhaps when we do so, we will come to see that Christ's true glory is greater than we could have ever imagined.

A glory not built through power or security, but for a call to serve so radical the world was transformed. And is still transforming.

Thanks be to God. Amen.