

The Twelve | Enrolled in the School of Jesus (B)

The Sons of Thunder Strike Again (Second Lesson on the Cross)

Mark 10.32-45

March 22, 2020

They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful. And again He took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him, ³³ saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴ "They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again."

³⁵ James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." ³⁶ And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" ³⁷ They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on 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 to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" ³⁹ They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. ⁴⁰ "But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

⁴¹ Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. ⁴² Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. ⁴³ "But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. ⁴⁵ "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

We've seen that Jesus Christ as the perfect teacher. His disciples address Him as "Teacher" (v. 35) – it's a big part of His mission! And His teaching METHOD is very different from the way we teach today. Imagine if seminary classes were taught this way...three years of on-the-job-training on a perpetual field trip.

His teaching method involved a lot of repetition (that's why it may seem like we're reading the same thing each week). AND it was never for Him purely academic/intellectual or even behavioral. He went into the dark-continent of the heart in His students. "What's that?", you ask, and "How does the heart differ from the mind?" Great questions!

The heart is more than just emotion. The heart is what drives our decisions. It's where our motives live AND the heart is where our desires reside. What do you DESIRE? What do you love? What do you want? That's what this passage is about and what we want to consider today – DESIRE IN THE HEART?

If someone were to ask you – "What do you want out of life? What do you wish for? What do you desire?" I don't mean they ask your "Sunday-self" – but your "Monday-self": what do you

want? What do you want for your kids and grandkids? How would you reply – if you were on truth-serum? What if you REALLY knew what you wanted – AND what if you actually GOT IT?

Let's go with the Teacher now and give Him access to the heart – to help us analyze our own heart's desires:

- The Sons of Thunder Strike Again: What Do You REALLY Want?
- The Merciful Teacher Asks Again: Can You Drink the Cup?
- The Blind Who See Again: How shall we now lead and live?

First: the Sons of Thunder Strike Again: What Do You REALLY Want? The question of desire, the difficulty of knowing our desires and the unintended consequences of GETTING what we desire are major ideas explored in Western philosophy, psychology and in some of the great literature. Perhaps you know the legend of *Faust* who sells his soul to the devil in order to get what he desires.

There are so many versions iterations of that legend – like the legend of Robert Johnson, the Blues guitarist who went down to the cross-roads, the place where the barrier between this world and the spiritual world is THINNEST. And Robert Johnson (as the legend goes) sold his soul to the devil to become the best... and then died at a very young age. (27!)

Great books like *The Picture of Dorian Grey* or *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck... a couple gets what they most desire (OR think they desire) a way out of their situation in the form of a great pearl... and it turns out that they DON'T really want that at all – and it turns out very badly – the unintended consequences of realized desires.

Lots of people want to be famous...want to be internet influencers or want to be rich and powerful and when they get what they want – they win the lottery and they become miserable... and yet... while we all know these stories... people are still buying lottery tickets... dreaming of becoming famous etc.

We have a sentimentalized view of desire. “When you wish upon a star/Makes no difference who you are/Anything your heart desires will come to you/ No request is too extreme/When you wish upon a star/As dreamers do/Fate is kind.”

If we can step back...not to be unfeeling or emotionless but to scrutinize our sentimentality and simply ask, “Do I even know what I really want out of life and WHAT IF I GOT IT?”

So here we find Jesus and the Twelve ON THE ROAD – at the cross-road, walking into Jerusalem for the last time. Storm-clouds are gathering and the sun is setting and the shadow of the Cross is lengthening. It is bidding Jesus, “Come and Die.”

And the Teacher states for the third time in the most explicit way, “I, the Son of Man, am going to die. The disciples are amazed; the crowds are afraid. Luke adds that the disciples understood none of these things.”

Then these two brothers come. We met them last week when they (The Sons of Thunder) wanted to call down fire to consume the Samaritans. Matthew says they enlisted the help of their mother, who may have been the sister of Mary (which made her the aunt of Jesus and her sons, the first cousins of Jesus). They want glory. They think that will make them happy, so Aunt Salome (maybe) asks her nephew for a favor. This is what she wants for her sons and what they want for themselves – a desire of the heart.

She bows to him and asks. Did anyone ever tell you, “It can’t hurt to ask?” So she does and THEY do. And it was a selfish and grossly insensitive request esp. in light of the announcement Jesus Christ just made in the most detail so far. AND it goes against everything He’s been REPEATING to them from the start.

And it says something about their view (not only of themselves – a grossly inflated self-image!) but also about their view of Jesus: He is a crooked politician who grants favors to His friends – that’s how they see Him even after ALL they’ve been through. “He,” they thought, “had a lot of high ideals and even did miracles but when He takes the throne – it’ll be business as usual and He’ll be as corrupt as every other king we’ve even known...”

And if you have swagger and use a little finesse (like your mom – His aunt!) you can wiggle your way into what you really want – it doesn’t hurt to ask!

What do YOU think? If you asked the average person, “What do you want out of life? What do you desire in your heart... for you... for your children... for your retirement...what’s the goal of life? If you wish upon a star...”

I think most people... want to be happy. And IS there anything wrong with that, “Life, liberty and the pursuit of HAPPINESS”? Isn’t it inscribed on our national psyche and in our founding documents?

But what if what we think will make us happy wouldn't really make us happy or what we became happy in a way that ultimately led to our destruction like in *Brave New World* (Aldous Huxley) where all the citizens are given a substance called “Soma” that enables you to take astounding utterly realistic vacations IN YOUR MIND and everyone is ridiculously, happy?

The point is what is our own concepts of happiness are far short of what God has in store for us... what if our primitive ideas that happiness comes from the accumulation of sex, money and power... WHAT IF, AS C.S. Lewis so famously said, “We are sitting in mud-puddles in a ghetto and

someone is offering us a vacation at the beach and we turn it DOWN because we don't know what a beach IS."

And Jesus could have blasted these "sons of thunder" for their selfishness or their slander of Him (because they saw Him as just another corrupt King) but instead... mercifully, He chalks it up to simple ignorance. "You do NOT know what you are asking."

What a colossal statement that IS and how it alerts us ALL to the fact that WE DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT WE WANT – what we desire. We want things that are not good for us...that we THINK will make us happy but we don't really know what happy IS much less how to get there. But thankfully for many of us...we are, like those ignorant disciples, we're ON THE ROAD with the One Teacher who can help us.

The Merciful Teacher diagnoses these guys. "You don't KNOW", He says. And then He brings their "can-do" attitude to the surface with that searching question: "Are you able you drink the cup that I drink?"

And of course they say, "WE ARE ABLE".

And I see Him tenderly looking at them as He sees them eventually facing persecution and death. He's saying, "You want to drink a glass of champagne and be baptized with a shower of confetti and glory in a victory parade – you don't realize that MY CUP TO DRINK IS THE CUP OF JUSTICE and MY BAPTISM IS THE DOWNPOUR OF WRATH."

"I am not come to be served but to serve and to give My life a ransom for many. I drink the cup that ONLY I CAN DRINK – I drink the cup that YOU DESERVE IN YOUR PLACE – a substitute, a ransom. I am paying the debt that you deserve."

The other disciples got all indignant – they probably called it "righteous indignation" (that's what I used to call it when I got mad at bad and ignorant people) but now I realize that like 99.9% of the time – righteous indignation in myself is just a nice word for self-righteousness. The indignant disciples were just as bad as the sons of thunder – they were just holding it in – IN THEIR HEARTS.

Truth is NONE of them had ever really imagined a Kingdom in which the King was a servant. And none of them had ever really dreamed of a Kingdom in which the King lives on behalf of traitors and rebels and criminals OF THE KINGDOM.

They'd never imagined that what really leads to happiness is service and that the only way we can serve in a way...the only way we can obey and love in a way that isn't a bald attempt to get recognized and appreciated and applauded by others and by God – the only way we can LOVE

and SERVE is to know the deep, deep security of being loved by the King who died to make rebels into sons and daughters.

To the degree that we KNOW that security, we can go to the back of the line. We can serve. We can forget about our quest OUR, wimpy desire for glory, for recognition – for sex, money and power and just rest in the fact that THIS KING WHO DIED IN MY PLACE A RANSOM – to make this wretch His treasure. He alone knows what happiness IS and ONLY HE CAN TAKE ME THERE.

You know this scene, on the road, is found in Mark, Matthew and Luke and all three go directly to the next scene – the healing of blind men. Mark gives us one of their names, Bar-Timaeus – it means “Son of Honor” or “Son Highly Treasured.”

I think all three writers included that next scene to show – “see the disciples, in fact this whole world had NEVER seen a King and a Kingdom like this – but once He opens your eyes and you see Him who loved, served, lived, died and rose for you – OUR RANSOM - when you see that YOU ARE THE SON HIGHLY TREASURED – you can serve, you can drink your own cup in the power or grace and the Spirit – and leave your happiness in His nail-scarred hands.

NO ONE who believes that will be disappointed.