

Have You Lost Your Mind?

[Text - Mark 10:35-45]

Pastor Dave Shackle
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As the long and tedious Presidential Campaign grinds incessantly onward, there are two key questions that I think every candidate should answer with absolute honesty. The first is, "Are you sure that you want to be President?" And the second is, "Have you completely lost your mind?" Now certainly, being *elected* President is one of the greatest accomplishments a citizen can achieve; however *serving* as the President must be the most daunting and frustrating job imaginable - particularly in this political climate of open hostility, governmental gridlock, and blatant contempt for any semblance of constructive compromise. Strangely enough, this quest for the Presidency has some similarities with what's happening in this morning's New Testament reading. James and John may not be seeking a seat in the White House, but they are envisioning seats on white horses - one on Jesus' right and the other on his left - as Jesus charges triumphantly forward to totally crush all those who opposes him!

Even though Jesus has clearly told his disciples that he's not going to Jerusalem to receive an heroic acclamation as a conquering Messiah - but to face the hostile condemnation of those who reject his message of Divinely inclusive love - the disciples still don't get it! They are all still thinking about gaining personal power, or fame, or fortune from their close association with Jesus. So James and John want to be right there beside him for his glorious inauguration. Even though the disciples are beginning to realize that Jesus may be the Messiah, their understanding of what that actually means is completely upside-down. Like many people in First-Century Israel, they envision a Messiah who will storm into Jerusalem and drive-out those evil Roman oppressors. Yet Jesus' understanding of the role of Messiah is altogether different. He has not come to lead a military revolution. He has come to proclaim a revolutionary message of peace and unity, compassion and justice for *all* people. Jesus' mission isn't to restore the sovereign nation of Israel; but to usher in the Divine Realm of Universal Love and Grace.

As the Messiah - as the Divinely Anointed One - Jesus chooses the path of self-giving love and grace, as the way to transform this troubled world. Taking his disciples aside, Jesus says, "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. But it is not to be so among you. For whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you must be a servant of all." Naturally this radically different approach to leadership seems a bit strange and foolish to Jesus' first followers; just as it can seem rather foreign and flawed to many of us today.

Within our culture, and sometimes within our churches, self-serving ambition is both encouraged and rewarded. The American Dream is to get ahead - to climb the ladder of success - financially, socially, politically, and materially. Yet how different

that is from Jesus' Dream. Jesus envisions living his life in a way that will help lift-up the lives of others. He aspires to give of himself for the sake of others. His deep desire is to use his life, and to give his all, in loving service to all people. He doesn't do it for the glory or praise or prestige; he does it because he truly believes that it is the right and good and God-like thing to do! So rather than give-in to the religious establishment's demand - to abandon his message of extravagantly inclusive love, Jesus chooses to stand firm and take whatever may come. He is even willing - if necessary - to endure a totally undeserved and terribly agonizing death upon a cross. And on that cross, Jesus still speaks words of forgiveness, grace and peace, even to those who put him there! Even in his *dying*, Jesus continues to raise-up the hopes and lives of people who are often considered worthless, despised and morally inferior.

Think about the status of the first person Jesus welcomes into the Divine Realm. It isn't James or John; it isn't some renowned religious or world leader. Jesus says "Today you will be with me in Paradise" to a convicted criminal who is being executed beside him- *literally* positioned at his right or left hand! It seems that James and John dodged a bullet - or a Roman spear - when Jesus didn't simply grant their request to be at his side when he entered his glory. They had no idea what they were really asking for, in their campaign to be "first and foremost!" Fortunately, our historic perspective helps us to better understand the inverse order within the Divine Community that Jesus envisions.

In Jesus Christ, you and I are shown a perfect example of a life fully committed to graciously serve others - especially those vulnerable people who are lowest and last in eyes of society. And while Jesus' way isn't an easy path to follow, it is infinitely better than the cold and calculating and competitive way of this world. The crucial difference is that following the self-giving way of Jesus Christ brings about tremendous blessings for *all* people - those

who are served, as well as those who serve. Our willingness to share our resources, rather than selfishly hoard them, reveals the reality of Divine Abundance. Our willingness to put others first, brings about a genuine peace and joy - for them and for us. And as Jesus faithfully proclaims and demonstrates, even laying down one's life for the sake of others, can - and will - bring-forth a Newness of Life.

In the Gracious Realm that Jesus Christ reveals and cultivates, the surprising reversals are absolutely mind-blowing! The little and the lowly, become the greatest and most highly exalted! Giving and serving, truly *are* their own tremendous reward! Welcoming the scorned outsider, is the inside-track to encountering the Sacred Holy One! And the greatest surprise of all, is that our dying is not a failed ending, but a fantastic new beginning! When you and I learn to trust that, then the way we live in the here-and-now will truly be fearless and free, giving and gracious. There will be no need to be concerned about who "wins" this world's prestigious positions, because all of Creation will bask in the Light and Love of our One Eternal Source.