

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Intro

Well, they're at it again.

It seems that those Disciples will never understand what Jesus is talking about – he must have felt that way too.

Over the last few weeks, we have heard Jesus tell his Disciples what it means to be his follower and the true meaning of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus asks them who they thought he was – and Peter responds “You are the Messiah.”

Then Jesus goes on to tell them exactly what that will mean for him and what lies ahead for them in Jerusalem – not just once but three different times.

And still they don't get it – in fact, they end up arguing amongst themselves about who was the greatest.

And now, following Jesus' third Passion prediction – James and John show that they still don't understand, as they ask to sit at Jesus' **right hand** and his **left**.

I. Gospel

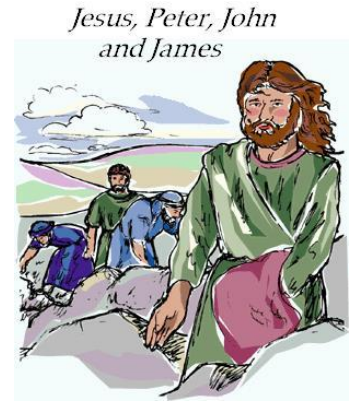
A. Some Scholars see this story as paralleling or even balancing the incident in which PETER is rebuked.

1. Peter, James and John were recognized as the inner core of the disciples, the ones closest to Jesus.

2. Whenever something important is going to happen to Jesus; Peter, James and John are there.

3. They are there at the Transfiguration – and they are the ones near him in the Garden of Gethsemane – truly they were the closest to Jesus.

4. They were also the most revered Apostles of the Early Church, yet in Mark’s Gospel – as this story shows – they are often depicted as being slow to understand the meaning of Jesus’ ministry, and instead clinging to their own worldly ideas of who and what kind of Messiah Jesus **should** be.



5. For that is what we clearly see in today’s Gospel reading.

6. Here are **James** and **John** coming to Jesus and asking to sit one on his **right** and one on his **left** in his coming glory.

7. They have come to think of the Kingdom of God as some kind of career ladder.

8. Again, they can only conceive of this as an earthly Kingdom with Jesus as the mighty Messiah who frees his people from Rome.

B. Jesus has an interesting response for these two glory seekers.

1. He says, “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”

2. Now, the “cup” in the Bible is usually an image for a person’s destiny.

3. And so to “**drink the cup**” became a metaphor for martyrdom and suffering.

4. In the same sense “**Baptism**” is used here as an example of self-emptying love.

5. As one scholar put it, “There is not sharing in the Messiah’s triumph that does not begin as sharing his sacrificial death as well.”

6. And our two clueless heroes respond, “We are able.”

7. And what happens at the moment of truth, at Jesus' arrest and crucifixion? They desert him, just like all the others.

C. Of course, the rest of the Disciples become indignant when they hear of this request by James and John.

1. They were probably mad that they didn't think of it themselves – and are now worried they're going to miss out on some benefit James and John will get.

2. You see, the Disciples are still as clueless as James and John, about what true leadership in the Kingdom is all about.

3. So Jesus once again reverses the tables on them and tells them **and us** the true meaning of following him.

4. He 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 so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be slave of all.***”

5. While worldly leaders assume all the trappings of power and demand obedience from their subjects – the followers of Jesus are to follow a different path – that of **SERVANT LEADERSHIP**.

6. For the followers of Jesus, *the heart of discipleship is **service**, not **privilege**.*

7. The person who is truly great is the one who seeks always to provide for the needs and welfare of others – the one who is ready to be the servant of all.

II. True Service

A. So what became of **James** and **John**?

- Were they able to drink of the cup that Jesus drank?

- Did they ever understand this new model of Servant Leadership?

1. Let me tell you a little more about them and let you decide.

2. Following Jesus' Resurrection, **James** became one of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem.

3. In the 12th Chapter of the Book of Acts, we read "*About that time Herod the King laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the Church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword.*" (Acts 12:1-2)

4. So **James** DID share in Jesus' Cup as he was the FIRST of the Apostles to die for him.

5. **James** is the Patron Saint of Spain.

- Some traditions hold that he actually went to Spain and preached there before returning to Jerusalem and being martyred in 44AD.

6. Other traditions hold that his body was taken there for burial and that his remains are enshrined in Compostela where countless pilgrims journey each year walking the "*Santiago de Compostela.*"

B. John on the other hand had a different fate.

1. The Book of Acts records several events where **John** was with Peter in and around Jerusalem.

2. Eventually, **John** settled in **Ephesus**, on the coast of modern day Turkey, where later under persecution he was EXILED to the island of Patmos.

3. It is there, tradition holds, that he experienced the visions recounted in the Book of Revelation.

4. While **John** may not have written the Gospel that bears his name, the COMMUNITY that grew up around his teachings in **Ephesus** certainly did.

5. **John** probably died in **Ephesus** – and he alone of the Twelve is said to have lived to extreme old age and was spared a martyr's death.

6. And there have been those of countless generations who have followed **James** and **John** in answering Jesus' call to be **Servant Leaders**.

III. Living the Call

A. The great Christian Writer **Henri Nouwen** writes:

“The long and painful history of the church is the history of people ever and again tempted to choose **power** over **love**, **control** over **the cross**, and **being a leader** over **being led**.” (Synthesis 2009 – emphasis added)

1. But the way Jesus leads is in another direction.

2. Again, **Henri Nowen** writes:

“The way of the Christian Leader is not the way of upward mobility in which the world has invested so much, but the way of **downward mobility** ending on the cross.”

3. He continues: “It is not the leadership of power and control, but a leadership of powerlessness and humility in which the suffering servant of God, Jesus Christ, is made manifest.”

B. Where do we find OURSELVES in all of this?

1. Are we with the Disciples – with James and John – searching for the glory that will bring us **WORLDLY SUCCESS**?

2. Or do we take for ourselves Jesus' call to be **SERVANT LEADERS**
- to follow where he leads – and to be the **SERVANT** of **ALL**?

3. The answer is for each and every one of us to decide – and the way of doing it is as different as the people in this room.

Conclusion

As you ponder this question, I'd like to share this story about the true meaning of service.

Once there was a woman who lived in a little central European village.

She was a nurse and had devoted her life to caring for her neighbors.

She was there at birth and at death; she bound up scratches, bruises, and broken bones, as well as sitting through many nights with the seriously ill.

In the course of time she died.

She had no family, so the villagers decided to hold a lovely funeral service for her.

But the village priest had to remind them that she could not be buried in the cemetery, as the town was Roman Catholic, and the woman was a Protestant.

The villagers protested, but the priest held firm.

It was not easy for him either, since he too had been nursed by her.

Nonetheless, the canons of the Church were clear.

She would have to be buried outside the fence.

The day of the funeral arrived, and the whole village accompanied her casket to the cemetery, where she was buried – outside the fence.

That night, after dark, a group of villagers went back and moved the fence. (Synthesis 2003)

Are we, with the Disciples, with James and John, searching for the glory that will bring us **WORLDLY SUCCESS**?

Or will we take for ourselves Jesus' call to be **SERVANT LEADERS** and offer a portion of our **GIFTS** and **SKILLS** back to God in service.

Would they move the fence for you?

Let us pray

Almighty and most merciful God, we remember before you all poor and neglected persons whom it would be easy for us to forget: the homeless and the destitute, the old and the sick, and all who have none to care for them. Help us

to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy.
Grant this, Father, for the love of your Son, who for our sake became poor,
Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN. (BCP p. 826)