

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost, Gospel Year B

A Glory That Serves

Mark 10:35–45

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Nathan Hall

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."



This is a life where we know our worth and do not have to grasp for it. Your worth is immense: God thinks it is worth Jesus' life.

DIAGNOSIS: Humility

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Grasping at Greatness

Have you ever been in the presence of a name-dropper? You know the type. The person who continually mentions this famous person with whom they had the pleasure to work or that famous person with whom they had dinner or the other one who called them up the other day. They bask in the glory of the greats. They are worthy by association. As the name-dropper continues dropping names, perhaps you find yourself getting a little annoyed. Surely this person is not as important as all these names imply. They are just trying to impress you and everyone else around with the greatness of their associations. Their glory is no threat to your apparent greatness...right?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Inadequacy

Lurking beneath compulsion to name drop (and in fact beneath your own annoyance if you find name droppers annoying) may be a sense of inadequacy. When James and John approach Jesus asking that they might be seated at either side of him, they also are seeking a similar solution to their own inadequacy. In a world where value is ascribed by some societal consensus, we are desperate to know where we stand. Perhaps we cling to those whom the world has decided are worthy because we do not know how to have worth otherwise.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): No Solid Foundation

When we rely on a few others or society at large to define what or who is worthy and glorious we are left craving the accolades of others. If we try to define it for ourselves perhaps we fare slightly better, but even so quibbling doubts nag away. The trouble is there is no authoritative voice legitimizing our worth, so we grasp at straws. And when we hear God's authoritative voice, it does not endorse any of our self-glorification projects. Instead, that voice asserts "whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all."



PROGNOSIS: Glory

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): The Firm Foundation

While God may not endorse our self-glorification projects, God does make us glorious. Really, glory is a gift. Jesus said, “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” Jesus gave his life to ransom you. And that is your glory; God thinks so highly of you, of us, that God became human, and died our death. And Jesus raises us to new life, built on a solid foundation. This is a life where we know our worth and do not have to grasp for it. Your worth is immense: God thinks it is worth Jesus’ life.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Confident

Sure, we are still inadequate, but in Jesus that is no reason to

fret. Our inadequacies are no longer a threat. Faith has freed us. We are what Jesus has made us, new creations. So we have confidence that God will bring a good work to completion in us, even when, left to our own devices we have nothing to brag about.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Reveling in Service

The way of Jesus is the way of service. Jesus serves us. Jesus gives himself for us. We now have the confidence to do the same. We do not have to use other people to raise our status. In Christ our status is secure. We are sinners of God's redeeming. What could be more glorious than that? So now we have the security to risk hanging out at the right or left hand of all sorts of inglorious people.