

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

James and John lobbying Jesus

Mark 10:35-45

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost
analysis by Ed Schroeder

Sabbatarians,

1. The Gospel appointed in the RCL for next Sunday, Pentecost 22 (October 19), is Mark 10:35-45. It is the pericope of James and John lobbying Jesus for what they think will be the best seats in the house. A Crossings matrix for that text follows.
2. Now and then former students send me sermons or papers they have written—for my edification (always needed, always welcome) and sometimes for my comment (sometimes needed, sometimes not welcome). My add-on at the end of this Sabb.theol. is a segment from one such recent exchange. What made this one special is that the preacher mentioned me by name in the sermon as the one who had taught him what he was proclaiming to his congregation. I didn't recognize myself in what was ascribed to me. Some of you have probably had the same experience. If you wish, you can read below what I said.

Peace & Joy! Ed

I. A CROSSINGS MATRIX FOR MARK 10:35-45

PROLEGOMENA

1. Jesus' third passion prediction comes in the verses immediately preceding today's text (32-34). Again the disciples, as Mark presents them throughout his Gospel, respond in unfaith. Clueless that the throne awaiting Jesus will be wooden beams—one vertical, one horizontal—the sons of Zebedee lobby Jesus for the top spots when he gets to his "glory."
2. The same mentality surfaces in the other 10 disciples as well, once they hear that John and James have gotten to Jesus before they did. For the same sort of imagined "glory" is what they all want. The contrast between cross-theology and glory-theology, articulated by St. Paul in his opening chapter of I Cor. and borrowed from Paul by Luther in his Heidelberg theses (1518), is given us here in a hands-on case study.
3. Matthew is the only other evangelist presenting this pericope. His rendering has a few differences from Mark, but I can find no important weight to those textual variations. Others perhaps can.
4. The story line proceeds similarly in both Gospels:
 - A. The request comes for preferred seating. Jesus responds asking if they know what they are asking for, and if they are able to drink the cup and undergo the baptism, that implicitly accompanies his sort of glory.
 - B. They claim they can do it, and Jesus responds that they will indeed participate in his cup and baptism. But left- and right-hand seat assignments are someone else's jurisdiction—unnamed in Mark, "my

Father" in Matthew.

C. The ten get angry.

D. Jesus calls a huddle, speaking first of the modus operandi of Gentile rulers (patently the leadership style the twelve lust for), to which he appends his caveat: "It shall not be so among you."

E. He then describes his own alternate mode of Lordship, the upside-down pyramid of greatness, concluding with the Son of Man's own leadership paradigm: "not being served, but serving," which culminates in "giving his life a ransom for many."

5. Mark's 2 verbs for the Gentile style are "katakryriein" and "katexousiazein." NRSV renders the first "lord it over" which does convey the "kyrios" root in the first term. But in rendering the second as "tyrant," NRSV veils the verb's root term. "Exousia" is authority. The contrast Jesus is making is not tyranny vs. non-tyranny, but two different ways to exercise authority. One is what's normal in our Gentile world: "Von oben herab," top down. The other, the mode of the Son of Man, is from beneath.

6. Given the many times in the gospels that Jesus' authority is a bone of contention, we should capitalize on the use of the term in this text, which actually is the answer to the running authority-riddle in his ministry. Jesus exercises authority by placing himself under the very ones he claims authority over! From this underside location, this ochlos position, we have followed him throughout the lectionary year of Mark. His is an upside-down authority. He supports those "beneath" him—if you can image that—by getting even farther down than they are in order to ransom them from going under forever.

7. His words that the disciples will drink his cup and receive his baptism might be a reference to their eventual martyrdom. But for Mark's theology, I think, that is too

bland. By the time Mark is writing this Gospel, Christians are “doing” baptism and “drinking the cup” in their communal life. By locating their participation in the future—after he has undergone his own cup and baptism—Jesus signals that baptism and cup, symbols of death for him, are signals of life for them. In baptism and the cup they (and all the ochlos) participate in the benefits of the cup and baptism he endured to effect their ransom, to get to “glory,” a glory he then shares after Easter with the ochlos of the world.

A CROSSINGS MATRIX FOR MARK 10:35-45

DIAGNOSIS: THE VIRUS OF GENTILE AUTHORITY

STAGE 1 Scrambling for “Authority Over”

Even disciples are not immune to the drive to get on top, of joining what today we call the culture of upward mobility. Who isn’t working hard to get ahead of others, get authority over others—even in personal relationships of marriage, family, friendships? And when one has gained such authority, who is not tempted to exercise it as Gentiles do (42)? It seems so right, once achieved, to keep it for oneself, to exclude others from sharing in it.

STAGE 2 The Scrambled Heart

Wanting and Wanton The heart within such authority-scramblers yearns for authority over. Oblivious that such “shall not be so” among the disciples of Jesus, such hearts desert the very Jesus they claim to be following. When they come with the request: “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you,” they have turned the tables 180 degrees on the proper teacher-disciple relationship. Central to such hearts is wanting to be served, rather than to serve, a heart that is then indignant

when others get there first.

STAGE 3 Scrambled Forever

“Drinking the (bitter) cup,” “being baptized” with eventual total God-forsakenness. Winding up excluded in the end from God’s own “glory,” the one Jesus achieves at cross and resurrection. Never benefitting from Jesus’ “serving,” i.e., never receiving his gift of being one’s ransom. Thus left to ransom one’s own life, by definition an impossible task.

A NEW PROGNOSIS

THE UPSIDE-DOWN AUTHORITY OF THE SERVANT MESSIAH

STAGE 4

Serving, not being served, Jesus drinks the cup, undergoes Calvary’s baptism, giving his life a ransom for all the scrambled folks. He swaps his own “being excluded by God” (“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” = the one and only word from the cross in Mark!) for the excluded in Stage 3 above. What service that is! [Borrowed from Matthew: Jesus exercises authority in a Jewish, not Gentile, mode. His *modus operandi* is the Davidic model of the OT. David, taken from Jesse’s flocks to be shepherd of God’s Israel, gets no new job description. It is only a change of venue and of clientele. As shepherd of Israel he is to use his authority to protect the sheep, laying down his life for the sheep when the sheep’s own life is threatened—and not vice versa, as Gentile kings do. Yes, David fails more than once to use his authority that way. His later son, aka Son of Man, does not.] Easter vindicates Jesus and his upside-down authority and testifies that such authority works on earth.

STAGE 5

The ransomed (now unscrambled) heart Hearts are changed by receiving Jesus’ “serving.” His “ransom” unscrambles the heart. Such hearts now trusting his upside-down authority receive new

“wants and wishes:” viz., “wishing to become great by being your servant,” “wishing to be first by being slave of all.” Such counter-cultural wishing will not survive except by constant trusting Jesus’ upside down authority on earth.

STAGE 6

Practicing Christ’s upside-down authority in the Gentile authority situations of one’s own daily lives. Using whatever authority one has in an upside-down way, sent out “to serve, not to be served.” Practicing all that we are “authorized” to do since we now operate under His Jewish/Davidic authority. Might that lead one into conflicts? Drinking bitter cups, even getting a “blood” baptism? Sure, but that was His way to “glory,” and is his disciples’ as well. Because he drank such a cup and underwent such a baptism, and lived to tell about it, his disciples now have his resources to do so too.

II. “IF THIS ISN’T WHAT I TAUGHT YOU BACK THEN, I SHOULD HAVE.”

Ernest (not his real name) sent me two sermons earlier this year. In one he names me [hardly an authority figure in his parish, I’m sure] as the prof who taught him what he was now preaching. It was a powerful “grace alone” sermon, yet with no reference to faith, nor to Christ “remaining” mediator—and therefore to be “necessitated” in every sermon—for that proclamation to be the whole Gospel. I told him that, but Ernest didn’t think so. In a lengthy and amiable response he said among other things:

“Ed, Jesus is not GOING to forgive my sins. Jesus HAS forgiven my sins and the sins of the whole world. To make acceptance of that or belief in that or even faith in Jesus the vehicle by

which that grace and love and forgiveness is received is, in the words of one of those two sermons, to take the gifts of God and turn them into works that we are somehow responsible for producing. That is not grace."

Here's what I said in return:

Ernest, as I read, and re-read, and re-read your long second-last sentence in that paragraph, it still comes out saying "No" to Article IV of the Augsburg Confession and its Apology. Since I've been purposely called over here to Klaipeda to teach the confessions, you'll not be surprised that I'm still inclined to stick to AC/Apol IV and not say yes to what sounds to me like your alternate proposal. Since AC/Apol IV is the actual topic of this very week's (Thursday) confessions class, I'll mention a few things that I intend to say to the Lithuanians.

- 1. There never was any conflict between the Confessors and the confutators on sola gratia. Both sides said "God's grace alone."*
- 2. The fight at Augsburg was on sola fide, by faith alone. The RCs said:
 - A. faith was not the "only" in justification, but needed to be augmented with works, and*
 - B. that God was gracious to sinners [no such thing as real wrath], even if they did not have faith in (=trust) God's promise in Christ.**
- 3. The Confessors' claim for faith was not that faith was a prerequisite sinners had to show before God would bestow the promise. It was rather that the very nature of God's promise, any promise, is such that when you don't trust it, it's not yours.*
- 4. It's parallel to the promise between you and your wife. If one spouse doesn't trust the promise spoken and offered and even enacted by the other spouse, spouse #1*

doesn't "have" the goodies of that promise, no matter how many times spouse #2 keeps repeating it. No matter even if he/she says "I HAVE already promised myself to you."

5. What I understand you, Ernie, to be saying says no to this understanding of faith. At least, so it seems to me. If not, then you've got to show me. 'Course it could be that my perceptive skills are slipping the way my memory seems to be. Here's a funny illustration of the latter. A couple days ago Marie asks: Did you hear what you just said? Ed: Huh? Marie: You said "Where did I put whatever it was that I was looking for?" That's double amnesia!
6. One thing you may remember from those ancient classes we had together is that I was hard on "sloppy agape." I.e., people understanding God's grace as a benign divine ooze. Grace, yes, but as Bonhoeffer reminded the sloppy-agape folks of his age: Costly grace, not cheap. Costly both on God's part and on the part of those receiving it.
7. If faith is irrelevant (or even worse, as you say "takes God's gifts and turns them into works"), then why does Christ commend faith so often in the synoptics? To say nothing about Paul's hype on *pistis*, nor John's Gospel's constant beating the drum for *pisteuein*.
8. Sounds to me as though you are at the edge of saying: Now that Good Friday and Easter Sunday have happened, everybody is saved no matter what their response is to the offer of what God was in Christ doing (ala II Cor. 5). I don't know any Biblical text that puts that slant on the matter. Do you? Wouldn't that be demeaning of us as God's creatures, God's images, if God just "shoved" forgiveness on us, regardless of our wish to have any, or of our response to the offer? Seems so to me.
9. When you quote me back to myself from seminary days "FORGIVENESS OFFERED WITH NO STRINGS ATTACHED" that is doubtless what I said. God's gift is offered with no

strings attached, but if I close my hands when the gift is tossed to me, do I get it, or don't I? Br'er Martin summarized it in 10 words: Glaubst Du, hast Du; Glaubst Du nicht, hast Du nicht. (You trust the Gospel, you got it. You don't trust it, you ain't got it.) Them's my sentiments. Not because ML says so, but because the Jesus of the NT says so.

With this pong back from me to your ping of Sept. 1, the ball's back in your court, so it's "your serve."

Pax et Gaudium! Ed