

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost - Year B

85th Sunday of Pandemic - Masked Service

Isaiah 53:4-12

Psalms 91:9-16

Hebrews 5:1-10

Mark 10:35-45

10/17/2021

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark:

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.”

The Gospel of our Lord.

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

### **A Servant's Mind**

Good morning! I would like to tell you about my experience in a place called Hell. Or at least, it certainly felt like I was in Hell. When I was a Younglife leader we had a car wash every year that was one of our biggest fundraisers. Now, when I say car wash you're probably thinking of some sort of small little get-together with a few high school students washing a couple dozen cars. You are WAY off. This was one of the craziest productions I had ever witnessed. In one giant parking lot, about half the size of the new Amazon building's lot down the street, we formed two car lanes. The vehicle would pull up to the first spot, with someone on each side rinsing down the car, then they would drive up to the next spot where they would be attacked by at least 4 different people who would wash it. They would then pull up again to the rinsing station, and finally drive up to the drying area where the vehicle would be attacked by hordes of kids with towels to dry it off. At the end of the line they could choose to give a donation or not, all the while a DJ played music to keep everyone entertained. Now, you would think that because I love to wash cars, this would be a fun experience for me... you would be wrong. It was like herding cats. The music made it hard to understand one another, because we had around 15 hoses connected, we didn't ever have enough water pressure, the cars had usually just come off the interstate, so the wheels and brakes were

hot. AND it wasn't uncommon to have a tractor trailer or two pull through. I would spend most of my time trying to make sure the soap and water in the buckets got exchanged periodically, and washing out sponges someone had dropped on the ground.

I would spend the entire day on high alert, anxious and nervous. What was always clear was that I was seeing things differently. Firstly, you don't usually show up to a high school car wash expecting the finest of details. But it also showed that not only does it take time to learn how to do a job correctly, but that SEEING the many variables that need to be covered would also take time. You can show someone how to wash a car, they'll nod their heads, and go about it regardless of whether they understand or not.

The disciples in today's Gospel lesson face a similar learning curve. And just like the high school students, Jesus is unable to impress upon the disciples the seriousness of what will come. In the past few months we have covered two of Jesus' passion predictions, and right before our text today Jesus once again predicts his death. But, as we have seen, the disciples have heads thick as stone and they continue to think that things will go well for them when they get to Jerusalem.

Jesus has spent the bulk of the past few chapters explaining to the disciples that the way they understand how the world works is wrong. It's the weak that are strong, it's the members of society with the least value that understand the kingdom of God. The poor, not the rich, are God's favored ones. But this was an incredibly hard concept for the disciples to understand because of a larger system that was in place heavily across the Roman Empire. And that was the system of patronage. When we think of a patron we often imagine a wealthy benefactor who helps a person or group with things like scientific research or in art communities, but in the first

century, patronage was the very lifeblood of the community. EVERYONE was in the system, with those who had power protecting those below them as long as they acted in their patrons' best interests. One scholar explains it like this: "*A patron-client tie is basically an asymmetrical exchange relationship. The parties on both ends of such a tie are unequal in the control of resources, and so differ in terms of power and status. They are bound together mainly because their tie can serve their mutual interests through the exchange of resources.*"<sup>1</sup>

And at the very top of the pile was the Emperor. All power trickled down from him. While this system was more prevalent in Gentile cities, it was still a major part of life in Israel. So when James and John ask for seats at Jesus' right and left, they are seeking power over others in the system. Even Jesus' reply hints at the relationship when he tells them that he doesn't have that sort of power, it belongs to the patron more powerful than Jesus to decide.

Jesus again reminds them what it should look like if they want to be a follower of God; "*but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.*" We must stop and think about those around us first. If we truly claim to be a Christian, then we take on the same mindset that Jesus had, caring for those around us in ways that do more than help us look good. How far do we go? Just take a look at our first reading from Isaiah: "*4Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. 5But he*

---

<sup>1</sup> Chow, John K. *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth*. Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992. p. 105.

*was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. 6All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. 9They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.”<sup>2</sup> Our God has given everything for us; we too are called to become a servant to those all around us. David B. Howell finishes his commentary on our text with a prayer from St. Francis of Assisi<sup>3</sup>, and I too found it especially fitting. Let us pray:*

*“O Divine Master, grant that I may not seek so much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love, for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.” Amen.*

---

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 53:4-9 NRSV

<sup>3</sup> Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word. Year B, Volume 4.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 192.