# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

**“Kingdom Servants”**

**Mark 10:35-45**

**March 7, 2021**

In our journey through the Gospel of Mark, we have reached the tenth chapter. Jesus and his disciples are walking toward Jerusalem where, in a little over a week, Jesus will be crucified. In the verses immediately preceding the passage we will read this morning, Jesus has once again told his disciples of his coming suffering and death, telling them that he will be betrayed, sentenced to die, handed over to the Romans who will mock him, spit on him, flog him with a whip, and kill him. But after three days he will rise again. Jesus is on his way to the cross; but the disciples, as we are about to learn, see something different awaiting them. They are looking for glory. I invite you to turn with me to Mark 10:35-45

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came over and spoke to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do us a favor.” “What is your request?” he asked. They replied, “When you sit on your glorious throne, we want to sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left.” But Jesus said to them, “You don’t know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism of suffering I must be baptized with?” “Oh yes,” they replied, “we are able!” Then Jesus told them, “You will indeed drink from my bitter cup and be baptized with my baptism of suffering. But I have no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. God has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen.” When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. So Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The contrast between the first and the last verse is striking: selfish ambition versus serving sacrifice. While James and John are focused on thrones, Jesus is focused on the cross. While James and John want Jesus to do them a favor, Jesus will pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Not my will but your will be done.” It would have been wonderful if the disciples had responded to Jesus’ prediction of his death by serving him and asking what they could do to support him in his terrible ordeal to come. They did love Jesus but, as is true for most of us, their love contained self-serving motives.

In response to their request, Jesus does not rebuke them. He does not say, “What’s the matter with you? How can you be so proud?” But he does say to them, in effect, that they have completely misunderstood what life in the kingdom of God is all about. Their expectation for life as followers of Jesus is honor, power, and security. Jesus has been telling them that as his followers they must expect sacrifice, service, and suffering. They, like Jesus, will drink from the bitter cup of suffering. Their experience will be different from what happened to Jesus, but kingdom life is not about stepping on others in order to make it to the top. It is about lifting others up so they may stand.

James and John had stepped all over the other disciples, beating them to the punch, so to speak, by being the first to ask Jesus for the best seats in the kingdom. And the other ten disciples were indignant - they were angry, offended, and annoyed. Why? Because they, like James and John, were applying the principles of worldly living to kingdom of God living. As Jesus pointed out, they were acting like people in the world who like to lord it over others and who enjoy flaunting their authority. But, among them it must be different.

Jesus calls them to service and, as he illustrates using his own life as an example, service involves sacrifice. Jesus came to serve, and to serve is to enter into the suffering of others. People suffer from unmet needs. We all have the need to be loved, to feel secure, to be significant, and to be in relationship with the God who made us. And, when one or more of those needs is not being met, we suffer. Serving others means to meet them in their place of suffering, at the place of their unmet need, and to begin meeting that need. Only Christ was able to meet the need of restoring our relationship to God, a need he met on the cross, but you and I can live in such a way as kingdom servants that we are in touch with and determined to help others. We come alongside them in their suffering, and we enter into that suffering not simply with compassionate feelings but with healing action. Because God first loved us, we are called to love God and neighbor as ourselves. We love it when God meets our needs, and we share God’s love with others when we serve them. This is how life is to be lived in the kingdom of God.