

Mark 10:35-45; Pentecost 20B; 10/18/15 **Pastor Ellen Schoepf**

I remember the first time I traveled to Washington DC. As we got closer to the city, I could feel the excitement rise within me. I remember how amazed I felt as we entered DC and saw the monuments, the Capital building and the White House. I could feel the power and authority present in that great place.

As I studied today's reading from the gospel of Mark, I thought of that experience. You see, today we find Jesus and the disciples on the way and nearing the end of their journey to Jerusalem, that place of power and authority. Jesus has been attempting to prepare the disciples for what lies ahead. However, they still seem clueless. They know Jesus keeps talking about a kingdom. They know Jesus is bringing change to their world through his proclamation that the kingdom of God is at hand. And, one can almost sense the excitement and energy escalating as they get closer to Jerusalem. After all, they are headed to the most important city in the world, at least the most important for any good Jewish man or woman. Jerusalem is the city where the Temple stands – it is where the seat of religious authority exists and the disciples think this is finally going to be the time! You see, they think the time is about to unfold when

Jesus will **claim his** power and authority. They are thinking Jesus will finally lead the Jewish people in a revolt that will free them from Roman rule.

I sort of understand James and John's desires. As they begin to approach Jerusalem, they know something monumental is about to take place and they want to share in that experience. They want to sit beside Jesus and hold places of power as change happens.

"Arrange it," they said, "so that we will be awarded the highest places of honor in your government – one of us on your right, the other on your left." They want the most important cabinet positions. After listening to their audacious demand, Jesus responds by saying, "You have no idea what you're asking. Are you capable of drinking the cup I drink, of being baptized in the baptism I'm about to be plunged into?" His response to them must have been confusing. Then he said, "Come to think of it, you will drink the cup I drink, and be baptized in my baptism. But as to awarding places of honor, that's not my business. There are other arrangements."

Jesus has just spoken about the change that is coming, but it is nothing like the change the disciples are expecting. And, Jesus knows those who wield power in the world will do all they can to

protect themselves and their prerogatives. James and John have no clue that, because of their leader's boundary-breaking ministry, rejection and death will be the inevitable baptism Jesus will be "plunged into!" They have no idea they, too, will share in the same baptism as they live into this coming reign of God.

What James and John were about to see was going to be life shattering and transforming. Yes, there will be a shift of power and authority. Yes, there will be an enthronement as Jesus assumes "kingship." However, the **enthronement** of Jesus will be claimed when he is lifted up on a cross and dies as an utterly despised and powerless "king." And, the two people who will share in this enthronement as Jesus fully enters into solidarity with the world, the two who will be positioned one on his right and one on his left, will be two common criminals!

James and John desired positions of power and authority. And, the rest of the disciples, frustrated and probably jealous, lost their tempers. The disciples get angry and Jesus again tries to teach them about power. Jesus said, "You've observed how godless rulers throw their weight around, and when people get a little power how quickly it goes to their heads." Jesus knows that power corrupts as it is

wielded to maintain and protect those who hold positions of authority. He describes sociopolitical authorities who rely on coercion and control to maintain dominance. And then, in absolute contrast to such power, he says, “It’s not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave.” Jesus tells them the greatness and power they will know will be measured by their ability to live as servants and slaves. Such greatness means suffering oppression at the hands of those who **wield** power!

The disciples’ shock must have made them speechless! Who in their right mind **chooses** to become a slave? Jesus then goes on to say, “This exemplary servitude is what the Son of Man has done. He came to serve, **not** to be served – he came to give away his life in exchange for many who are held hostage.” Well, the disciples must have thought Jesus was a bit crazy. After all, why would someone become a slave as a way of **freeing** those who are held hostage?

Jesus has been trying to tell the twelve his death will be an example of the violence and resistance his teaching and ministry elicit from those who **hold** power over society. His death, this cup and baptism he is talking about, will be a radical **renunciation** of authority

and privilege. And his death will **do** something. His death will be a **ransom** for many!

The Greek word used for “ransom” means liberation or freedom. Jesus is really saying is that through his death, God will free people from oppression and **captivity** to **another** power. God will restore people to membership in the community that is the kingdom of God. He makes all of this quite clear. And yet, the disciples simply do not grasp such servitude and, quite frankly, neither do we!

Power is such a subtle thing. The accumulation of power slowly turns what was once abundance and “more than enough” into necessity as we focus on trying to protect all that what we have accumulated. Power turns us from living lives of service into people who want to be served. However, Jesus calls us to live differently as **he empowers** us with his **presence** and a **power** that is not to be maintained, but **poured out**. Our power is the presence of this one whose life is broken and poured into ours. And, Jesus draws us into his love so our lives can then be spun out again into the dark places where tyrants rule, consuming all things for their own benefit.

On this Bread for the World Sunday we join Christians throughout the country to do an Offering of Letters as we seek policy change so the hungry in this world **will** be fed. As we do this, Jesus sends **us** to resist the powers, patterns and policies of **this** world where letting others go hungry and uneducated for the sake of our perceived safety is not a mark of our faithfulness, but a mark of our blindness and desire to control. We **are** new creatures in Christ and are no longer ruled by the rhythms of an unredeemed world. We have been freed from our captivity to ungodly powers. Hear Jesus' words to us today as he calls us to display a holy rhythm, a new song where our lives are extensions of God's justice and mercy in this broken world.