

## **Pentecost 22B – Lectionary 29 – 10/20/2024**

How many of us have said that we really don't understand some people's way of thinking? Our culture today has many conflicts and/or paradoxes. It hasn't changed since the time of our Gospel lesson today. Only today it seems to be more polarized.

History continues to repeat itself and only we can be responsible for ourselves. The last verse of our Gospel lesson last week was "but many who are first will be last, and the last first". Then in between last week and this week's Gospel lesson Jesus forewarns of his pending death again.

So, when James and John ask Jesus to do for them what they want, you just want to say, "where did that come from?" Did they hear anything that Jesus had said? Following Jesus was about giving all that you had to help others. It wasn't that long ago that we heard Jesus say to follow means that disciples need to deny themselves.

James and John were attempting to put themselves above others, let alone their friends. Jesus challenged them, Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They said, yes we can do that. Jesus has just once again predicted his death, were they really willing to say that they would be willing to die also?

Thus far, it didn't seem that they liked all of the negative attention from the church leaders. Here they were saying that they were willing to be leaders of the other disciples. Didn't they realize that leadership puts you in the hot seat more than you usually want to be?

Jesus thought, well I don't think they really understand what this means, but so be it. In the end, as God's Son, he doesn't make those decisions. Of course, once the other disciples had heard about their request, they were angry. Maybe because they hadn't thought of it or why do they think that they are better than us?

Jesus reminded them that the people who were not Jewish recognize as their rulers, men who lorded it over them. The greatest being those who were tyrants. We have those rulers in our world today where there is no democracy. Jesus once again defines what God is looking for, which is that the greatest rulers are servants.

Jesus says if you want to be on the top, then you must be a slave to all. He gave the ultimate model for this in dying on the cross. This ransom that we hear about in our Gospel lesson is not about any transaction as Jesus does the work for us. It is a liberating action for us. It frees us to be the servant that Jesus has modeled for us and calls us to be.

I like how the inclusive Bible states what God is not looking for, someone who is domineering and arrogant, those great ones know how to make themselves important. Often these leaders have low self-esteem. When one feels that they have to dominate someone, it is often because they feel less than others. It's very tricky because if you have to make yourself important, then you may not realize that you are already important in God's eyes.

Jesus continually brings us back to what God wants leadership to look like. First of all, it is important to realize that we are already important in God's eyes and that is the most important thing to recognize and accept. When we can recognize that God loves us is when we can begin to love ourselves in a healthy manner.

Jesus is describing leaders as a person who can listen and realize that they don't have all the answers. He is also looking for a leader who can be honest in a respectful way. It is not about telling people what they want to hear.

At times in our life, we can be domineering or feel dominated. We are all called to be leaders as we are all called to model what it means to follow Jesus, thus we are called to keep ourselves in check. In the end it is about power and control. Do we feel the need to have authority and exert power and control over others?

One of the red flags for us is whenever we feel defensive. If we feel that we have to justify ourselves, then we can easily become domineering. If we feel insecure enough we can also become arrogant.

Unfortunately, we have gotten to a place in our country where too many think it has to be one way. There are leaders who will say or do, or justify whatever they have to have it their way. Similar to James and John who felt that if they were in control they may be able to keep things more in their way of thinking.

Now of course we can't really relate to James and John, can we? At some time in our lives, each one of us has felt the need to control people and to have their approval. It is really part of being human, our brokenness.

As Christians, Jesus is reminding us today we need to check ourselves in how we relate to people. I believe that we are all leaders in faith and are reminded that in reality we don't have control over other people. When we try is when we are really telling Jesus that we know better. This is what James and John were doing.

Whether everything makes sense to us or not, Jesus tells us that God is in control. We are loved and valued by God and not all others will love and value us, but we do not need their approval. Through Jesus death and resurrection, we have seen modeled how to serve and that new life comes from it.

Let us pray: Gracious and loving God, thank you for loving and valuing us as your children. There are times that we do not recognize this and then try to go it on our own. This is when we may put ourselves over others. We are sorry for this. May your Holy Spirit help us to rest in you and give us the ability to see and hear how we relate to people that we may model that all of us are equal in your eyes. Also, to be able to discern future leaders in our country, according to what you are looking for in leaders. In Jesus Name, Amen