



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

October 18, 2009

## Pentecost 20

Sometimes people just don't get it. One of my favorite characteristics of the gospel of St. Mark is the humanity of the disciples. Mark was written 15-20 years earlier than Luke or Matthew and it is clear that over the 15-20 years the image of the disciples had become more polished and they were certainly looked upon with much more reverence. However in Mark, well, they just don't get it. Three times now Jesus has told them that they are going to Jerusalem and he will be killed and after three days will rise again.

Several times he has told them that whoever wants to be first must be last.

Several times he has told them that the son of man came not to be served but to serve.

Several times he has told them that it is servant hood that is the hallmark of being his follower.

Several times he has told them that taking up their cross will lead them, not to the riches of this world, but to the riches of gods kingdom. A kingdom that you will find on the earth not only among those who do well but also among the poor and the lame, the sick and the outcast, the forgotten and the unlovable.

Several times Jesus has accused them of hardness of heart when they have not understood his message of god, his message of love.

And they just don't get it. They still don't get it.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Established in 1847*

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On his way to Jerusalem for the last time up come James and John. And you can just see the scene in your minds eye. On the road Jesus is out ahead leading the way, striding to an encounter with all that is wrong in the kingdom of God. Striding to an encounter with those who have the authority in administering God's forgiveness. Dealing out God's grace by measures of worthiness. Striding to an encounter with death.

So John and James sped up getting alongside Jesus, enough ahead where the others cannot hear them. In secrecy and in murmur and hoping no one else has asked the question and secured the favor before them. Can we be the first vice presidents of the kingdom of God?

By the time Jesus has asked his other questions and gets to what John and James really want to know, the other disciples have obviously caught up. Their secret question was now public knowledge and the reaction of the other disciples was one of anger.

Yet I am sure that the reaction of Jesus was one of deep sadness because even now, even now while on his way to his last encounter with Jerusalem and all that it stood for, his disciples still did not get it.

The life I have called you to is not one of power but of service. It is not one of authority but of having the desire to work with those who you would not normally work with. The poor, the lame, the outcast, the untouchables, the unloved and unlovable. Those who see themselves as last and those who see themselves as lost.

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That is the call. But what are you willing to give up to make that happen?

If you see your life of service as placing you above others then it is not service.

If you see your participation in the community of faith only in terms of what you want, and who you think should be a part of it then that is not service

If you see your activity in the name of Christ being exclusive towards others then it is not service.

If you see worship as a vehicle only for your self fulfillment and not as something to draw others into the love of Christ it is not service.

If you seek positions of authority to be held with great respect because of your position it is not service.

If you use your service to show how good you are then it is not service

Our lord said You know that among all people those who they recognize as leaders lord it over them and there great ones are often tyrants.

But not so with you. Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant. And whoever wishes to first among you must be slave of all.

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Jesus said this because yet again the disciples did not get it. Even in the gospel of St. John, Phillip says Jesus shows us the father and we shall be satisfied. Jesus said have I been with you all this time and you still do not know me?

The disciples did not get it.

But the more important question is do we?

Amen

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