

Isaiah 53:4-12

Mark 10:35-45

Hebrews 5:1-10

“When they call on me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.” AMEN!

(Sing)
“Name above all names,
worthy of our praise;

My heart will sing how great is our God;

How great is our God,
Sing with me,
how great is our God; and
all will see how great,
how great is our God.”

That Chris Tomlin classic
reminds us of God’s “greatness.”

That word “great” has shown up
a lot in the last two election seasons.

And it shows up specifically in our gospel lesson
and in the OT reading.

“How great is our God.” (Pause)

These past few weeks we have moved

through Mark chapter 9 and 10.

These two chapters have specifically
taught us about the 3 different predictions
that Jesus made as he led
his disciples into Jerusalem.

The church calls them Passion Predictions
meaning Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion.

Each prediction varies slightly, but all of the
culminate with the joyous
resurrection on Easter morning,
but until then no one focuses on
that part of his predictions.

No, it's only the difficult, the denial, and the
suffering parts the disciples hear,
and frankly, that's pretty much
the same for us.

Yet, knowing that Jesus
"took the twelve aside again and
began to tell them
what was to happen to him,

saying, "Look, we are going to Jerusalem.

And [there] the Son of Man will be handed over

to the chief priests and the scribes, and
they will condemn him to death;
then they will hand him over
to the gentiles [Roman leaders];

they will mock him and spit upon him
and flog him and kill him, and after three days
he will rise again.”

That quote from Mark 10: 33-34 was
what happened just before we read about
the actions of James and John.

You know those Zebedee Boys;
Jesus nicknamed them the
“Sons of Thunder.” (Pause)

Even though that third prediction is not
in our actual reading today it looms large over
the actions of James and John.

You might recall, a few weeks ago,
when Jesus gave his second passion prediction,

it was John that interrupted his teaching
by calling out that he saw someone
casting out demons in Jesus’ name, and
they tried to stop him because
“he was not one of us.”

Ol' John, the son of Zebedee still had some
learning to do because his request
(with his brother James) is
astonishingly crude, selfish,
and inappropriate.

And it is quite in harmony with, practically,
all of human history.

I don't know if I'm more angry
at James and John for their audacity, or
at the rest of the disciples because
they appear to be angry for not
thinking to ask Jesus
the same thing first!

And with honest introspection,
I wonder if I'm so angry with all of "them"
because I see the same selfishness in
myself sometimes. (Pause)

Maybe this is what shocks us so much!

That we see such blatant self-promotion within
the ranks of Jesus' closest followers and
are reminded of the attitudes that
we adopt about "greatness."

Those attitudes are outside the church and
they are alive and well inside the church.

Our culture teaches “Blessed are the aggressive,
for they will climb the ladder.”

The world teaches “Blessed are the wealthy,
for they know no suffering.”

“Blessed are the arrogant,
for they will not taste loneliness.”

They are all lies, of course, but
it disturbs us when we see them running
rampant in the church, as if they are
God truths. (Pause)

“Teacher, we want you to do
a little something for us.”

Didn’t you tell us, “If there’s anything you need,
pray and it will be given you?”

Well, here goes.

Give us places of prominence.
Make us great! (Pause)

In one sense, Jesus was wrong in his reply
that they didn’t know what they were asking.

Oh, they knew, alright!

But in a deeper sense, which is always Jesus way,
he knew their request was for cheap
success which again revealed they had
no clue about the kind of God
they were meeting in Jesus.

And honestly, many today people today,
don't have a clue about the kind of God
we meet in Jesus.

Do we always understand the fiery baptism
that Jesus was baptized with and baptizes with?

Do we understand the cup that was necessary
for him to drink and
that we will drink?

Probably not, we just want to be among
the "great winners!" (Pause)

So, we hear the warning from Jesus.

We listen to his words and find that,
to be a committed Jesus follower,
means that we will find joy and peace.

It also means that we will be found,
as committed Jesus followers,
by trouble and suffering.

Christ following is not easy because
it means we recognize the image of God
in every single person.

Every... single... person...

“That includes the friend you know
who has broken his wife’s heart
by having an affair.

It includes the drunk driver
that killed a friend’s
(or even your own) child.

It includes the politician that you hate.”

This story is as challenging for us today
as it was for Jesus disciples.

It shows us how we so often get our
priorities out of order.

It shows us how much we need Jesus and his
instruction on “greatness.” (Pause)

You may have heard last year about Russell Moore,
he was the former head of
the Ethics & Religious Liberty
Commission of the
Southern Baptist Convention.

He said that,
“Multiple pastors” have reported
that congregants have objected to
their preaching about Jesus’

Sermon on the Mount because
they thought that “love your enemies”
was a liberal talking point.

The pastors were complaining that
preaching the message about
“loving your enemy” didn’t work anymore
in their congregations.

Wow!

Wouldn’t you love to hear Jesus’
response to that statement!

The truth is, all of Jesus’ life and purpose
was God’s response to that
fundamental belief about
loving one’s enemy.

Jesus told everyone that
if they want to follow him,
they must take up their cross...
and follow him.

Surely that cross can be loving your enemies,
and - frankly, it can sometimes mean
loving your family and friends
sometimes, too. :-)

In closing, the last verse of our reading
must be addressed.

“For the Son of Man came not to be served
but to serve, and to give his life as
a ransom to many.”

Jesus came with a servant's heart
to teach us about God and
to show us God.

We know that to be crystal clear.

What we may not know is that
the word “ransom” here,
isn't something you pay
to get your kidnapped child back.

It does not mean that here.

It's better defined here to mean
one that does something in
order to free someone,
liberate them, or
release them.

And that's what trying to love the enemy does for us.

It liberates us from debasing and othering people.

It means we don't need to fight fire with fire.

Think of the ways that would help people
experience heaven right now.

AMEN!