

**Christ Episcopal Church
2 Emerson Street
East Norwalk, Connecticut 06855**

The Twenty-second Sunday

after Pentecost:

Proper 24 (B)

October 21, 2018

8 and 10 AM Sermons

Sermons by the Rev. Joe Parrish

DRAFT

“Moving on up”

The Holy Gospel according to

Mark 10:35-45

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' And he said to them, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.' But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They replied, 'We are able.' Then Jesus said

to them, ‘The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.’

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, ‘You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become

great among you must be your servant,
and whoever wishes to be first among
you must be slave of all. For the Son of
Man came not to be served but to serve,
and to give his life a ransom for many.’

Dear God, soften our hearts so we
may give others hope. Amen.

Little children in Sunday School were
asked, “Who will be wearing the biggest
crown in heaven?” To which they
chimed back, “The one with the biggest
head!!!”

John Mackay, former president of Princeton Theological Seminary, said the two symbols of Christianity are the cross and the towel. Jesus suffered and died for our sins on the cross, but first he washed our dirty feet with his own hands and dried them with his own towel. The Maundy Thursday action becomes the ultimate model for us as Jesus' modern-day disciples. Whose feet have we washed this week? How have we selflessly served others? Where have we let our love show above our self-esteem?

An old hymn said ‘Rescue the perishing, care for the dying.’ We are called to do this.

As I reflected on the Gospels, I see the possibility that those who remembered the stories and those who wrote them down may be those who possibly reacted to hearing the twelve Apostles tell how Jesus ‘chose them’ and how they ‘walked with him’ and ‘talked with Jesus’, and so on. And I can see a bit of a reaction against what may have been perceived as a touch of haughtiness

in the twelve Apostles. Those who had borne up with the telling and retelling of Jesus stories may have been slightly peeved at what may have been a bit of bravado on behalf of the twelve Apostles, so there are a few stories where one or more of the Apostles were not so ‘goody-goody’ but are shown to have feet of clay just like everyone else. In today’s Gospel James and John vaunt themselves up a bit in seeking a promotion above the rest of the Twelve. They decide to ask for the top positions in Jesus cabinet, top bananas, Jesus’

closest confidants when Jesus takes over the Empire and establishes a new Holy Rule around here. James and John want to be right up there pitching for their Master, and being on his right and left hand they would be seen as Jesus' chosen Two, rather than just part of the Twelve. Isn't the Top Two a better position than just one of the Twelve, after all?

So here we may have the human condition a bit rawer than in much of the rest of the Gospels, where two 'top', I

meant, 'Top', disciples want a little more respect around here, if you please.

Of course, the writer of Mark is telling this tale of two brothers, James and John, and the writer of this gospel may have experienced what it was like first hand to deal with the Twelve, Second Banana, if you will. So, maybe cutting the Twelve down a notch in size seemed appropriate. Even Apostles can have their 'come-uppance'. And Jesus himself gently puts them in their place, foreseeing their coming martyred fates.

Also, Jesus in speaking about positions on his right and left may be alluding also to those two criminals who hung with him on crosses on his right and his left. Is that what James and John really want? Jesus is not so sure James and John realize what they are saying. Crosses are painful.

Pastor Samuel Wells wrote, “If there’s one thing every high school senior knows they must put on their application to [University] it’s their astonishing record of leadership. “While still in the womb I spearheaded the

movement for my twin and me to enter the birth canal.” “While still in nursery I organized the toddlers to campaign for recyclable diapers.” “While in first grade I represented my class at the school board showdown on whether to move to 2 percent milk at snack time.” “When I was in fourth grade I went on a Girl Scout expedition to the planet Jupiter and devised a system by which children could share oxygen on the return journey to save on baggage weight.” “When I was in eighth grade I [pushed] deep into the Amazonian jungle

and found a previously unknown tribe. I learned their language, taught them how to play golf, and helped them find a sustainable water supply.”

Don't we all want to seem superior, leaders, ahead of the rest of the pack, at least at times?

Retired Methodist Bishop Will Willimon wrote: “Jesus is not a technique for getting what we want out of God; Jesus is God's way of getting what God wants out of us. God wants a world, a world redeemed, [a world] restored to God. And the way God gets

that is with ordinary people like us who are willing to walk like Jesus, talk like Jesus, yes, and even if need be to suffer like Jesus.”

Comedian Dave Gardner once said, “Happiness is not getting what you want; it's wanting what you get!”

One mother writes, “When my son was in middle school he was assigned to make a timeline poster of the history of ancient Egypt for his science and social studies classes. The assignment was quite detailed in precision of its

instructions. It spelled out exactly what the dimensions of the poster must be, the precise scale of the timeline itself, the number of events and pictures to be included, etc. It even gave the precise beginning and ending years for the line: 4236 BC and 332 BC respectively. Now I have yet to determine where the date 4236 BC came from. Most historians would tell you that there can be no such precision for dates in Neolithic cultures. But I had no doubts about the choice of 332 BC for the end of the timeline. That was the year that Alexander the Great

conquered Egypt, beginning the Hellenistic Age in the eastern Mediterranean basin and North Africa.

“When I pointed this fact out to my then 11-year-old son, he not surprisingly quipped, ‘So what was so 'great' about Alexander?’ He got an impromptu history lesson in the midst of his science homework. I told him about the young student of Aristotle who had consolidated his father's rule over Macedonia and Greece, and then forged an empire that extended across the Mediterranean into Africa and eastward

to the Indus Valley -- all before dying at an age (32) younger than I was even at the time. I also reminded him that the majority of Alexander's army had marched across those vast distances on foot over a period of less than a decade. Like most of those on whom history has subsequently awarded the sobriquet 'the Great,' Alexander's greatness was rooted in power -- military and political power that could impose his will on his and subsequent generations.”

Bill T. writes, “I ran across this story and thought it was a bit humorous, but also pointed:

‘A man went to the doctor after weeks of symptoms. The doctor examined him carefully, then called the patient's wife into his office. “Your husband is suffering from a rare form of anemia. Without treatment, he'll be dead in a few weeks. The good news is, it can be treated with proper nutrition. You will need to get up early every morning and fix your husband pancakes, bacon and eggs, the works. He'll need a home-

cooked lunch every day, and then an old-fashioned meat-and-potato dinner every evening. It would be especially helpful if you could bake frequently. Cakes, pies, homemade bread: these are the things that will allow your husband to live. One more thing. His immune system is weak, so it's important that your home be kept spotless at all times. Do you have any questions?" The wife had none.

"Do you want to break the news or shall I?" asked the doctor.

"I will," the wife replied.

She walked into the exam room. The husband, sensing the seriousness of his illness, asked her, “It's bad, isn't it?”

“She nodded, tears welling up in her eyes. ‘What's going to happen to me?’ he asked.

“With a sob, the wife blurted out, “The doctor says you're gonna die!”

Bill T. tells another story: “King Louis XIV of France died in 1715 after a reign of seventy-two years. He had called himself ‘the Great,’ and was the monarch who made the famous

statement, ‘I am the state!’ His court was the most magnificent in Europe, and his funeral was also spectacular. As his body lay in state in a golden coffin, orders were given that the cathedral should be very dimly lit with only a special candle set above his coffin, to dramatize his greatness. At the memorial, thousands waited in hushed silence. Then Bishop Massilon began to speak; and slowly reaching down, he snuffed out the candle and said, ‘Only God is great.’”

Neil Armstrong, as a member of Apollo 11 crew, on July 20, 1969, became the first man to walk on the moon. After his historic flight, Armstrong, a devout Christian, visited the Old City of Jerusalem. At the Huldah Gate, which leads to the Temple Mount, the astronaut wanted to know if he was walking on the same stone walkway as Jesus did. When Armstrong learned it was the very same stones, he replied, “I have to tell you, I am more excited stepping on these stones than I was stepping on the moon.”

Application: We are to be humble servants of the Lord.

Ron L.

Rev. C. David Mckirachan said, “One Sunday I asked the kids in the Sunday school to write questions they wanted to ask me. It took them a few weeks to get rolling, but they filled up a box. In worship they pulled out the questions, one by one, read them and let me squirm. Some were fun, some were deep. The one I’ll always remember was, “What’s

the first thing you want Jesus to say to you?”

Rev. David, said, “I started to cry. I realized something. All I hoped for from my Lord was to be with him. I got it together and said, ‘Thank you. You just helped me learn something. What I want Jesus to say to me is, ‘David’.”

I don’t know if my answer was disappointing to them. But it was honest.

Pastor Stan Purdum writes, “I don't believe for a moment that God makes bad things happen to us so that we will

harvest some good out of them. The Lord is a God of love, not of torture.

“But he is also a God of redemption and power. He sometimes takes the pain of our lives and says, in effect, ‘Yes, it was a bad thing, and I didn't send it on you, but now look at what good things I can make for you out of it.’

“So what this suggests to us is that instead of praying, ‘Lord, give me this,’ or ‘Lord, grant me that,’ we should pray, ‘Lord, here are the pieces of my life that don't make sense, the broken pieces of my life, the frayed edges, the rough

spots, the pain and the unbroken parts as well. Make what you will of them, in that strange but loving economy of your kingdom.””

<https://www.sermonsuite.com/sermonstudio/strange-economy-kingdom-god>

Rev. Philip McLarty tells the story “of a track meet for special kids, kids physically and mentally challenged. The climax was the big quarter mile race at the end. The contestants lined up and the gun sounded. They were off.

Everything went well until they got to

the final turn. One of the contestants stumbled and fell. As soon as the others realized what had happened, they turned and came back to the fallen runner and helped him to his feet. Then, arm in arm, they limped together toward the finish line. As the herd of runners passed in front of the crowd, everyone stood to cheer them on. No one cared to notice who actually crossed the finish line first. What difference did that make? What mattered was that they finished – every last one of them completed the race – no one was left behind.”

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/sermons/mark-1035-45-healthy-ambition-mclarty/>

Remember, each of us enters heaven one at a time so we have responsibility for how we live our own lives. It is if we are climbing Jacob's ladder to heaven, one person at a time, so we need the person in front of us to hold on but keep climbing, and we hope and pray the person behind us will follow faithfully along, but we ourselves have to be very careful how we take the steps because everyone behind us depends on our not stumbling or falling off. Each and every

rung to heaven we take on Christ's ladder will require whatever talents we have been given to bring in God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. We are indeed called to be Jesus' disciples, but we need to stay on Christ's ladder and keep climbing in his service and in the service of others.

Amen.

Description:

Our concern is not self-promotion but in how we can be of service to God and others in bringing in God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Tags:

Ladder, Jesus, God, kingdom, service, James, John, disciples, Christ, apostles, king, Louis, great, Alexander, kids, physically, mentally, challenged, Jerusalem, Armstrong, moon, cross

Trinity Episcopal Church

207 West Main Street

Moorestown, New Jersey 08757

The Twenty-first Sunday after

Pentecost: Proper 24 (B)

October 18, 2015

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

DRAFT

“Our love should be a beacon of hope”

The Holy Gospel -- Mark 10:35-45

James and John, the sons of Zebedee,
came forward to Jesus and said to him,

“Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to

sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man

came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Lord, forgive us our sins as we forgive others who sin against us.

Amen.

Picture in your mind the crucifixion of Christ. Now picture two of Jesus’ disciples jumping in just as the nails are about to be put through Jesus’ hands and offering to put their hands on the cross instead of Jesus--James offering his right hand and John offering his left. No, we

can't even conceive of that happening, and of course it didn't happen. But in today's gospel lesson, that is what James and John were actually seeking, even though they did not know the details—Jesus had warned them over and over again of his impending sacrificial murder.

Could you picture the two hanging beside Jesus on their crosses as being his disciples, James and John? Wait! They were the ones who ran away when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, weren't they? When 'push came to shove' neither James nor John

were really up to ‘hanging with Jesus’, one on his left and one on his right, were they? No. The two Zebedee brothers only wanted ‘glory positions’, not gory positions. But Jesus often spoke of his glory indeed as being his crucifixion, not his exaltation in the heavenly realms.

That was far, far from what James and John were seeking. They were seeking earthly power, earthly aggrandizement, earthly praise.

When it comes right down to it, many want the glory of being the major domo, the great one, the top dog, but they and

we are not willing to go through what being the ‘great one’ really takes.

If you are in the midst of a group say yelling for the Mets not to ‘mess up’ and groaning each time the Met’s pitcher doesn’t pitch a strike out, or when every Met’s batter doesn’t get a hit. (Sorry Cubs fans!) But suppose we were to insert that fan directly into the game, even pay them a few dollars for the few seconds they were groaning about.

Would they do it? No, they prefer to scream at someone else’s incompetence, rather than to do the years of effort it

takes to become a major league baseball player or professional football or soccer player, assuming they even have the necessary skills. In other words, it is so easy for us to be ‘couch potatoes’ and rail and reign from our comfortable television seats or stadium seats, should we be so lucky.

Finding glory is not that easy, as glory tends to find us, I believe. Our job is to be ready when that glory finds us. We see it in the few heroes who save other’s lives by risking their own. We see it in the police and fire fighters who

put their lives on the line each and every day to protect us. I applaud them, every one of them, that they do the unthinkably brave duty and have to be ready at a moment's notice to sacrifice their lives. Recently a few have been sorted out as being bad cops, but 99.99 percent of them are dedicating their very lives to make our lives livable and secure and safe. These officers come perhaps the closest I think to whom we genuinely admire and look up to in their line of duty. But their life statistics show that this duty takes a great toll on their lives,

in injuries and deaths, split up marriages, and even suicides—police have the highest suicide rates of any profession, bar none. Some of us clergy and others even take advanced training as police chaplains to see what we can do to help those who really are in the line of fire to be better able to cope and live fulfilled lives after a tragedy that they tried to stop but could not prevent, or even after the tragedy they did prevent. Both success and failure take a severe toll on these dedicated men and women, even if the failure was not of their own failing.

Sitting on Christ' right or his left is serious business. And indeed implied in Jesus' response to James and John was that others than they would be the ones crucified beside him.

Servant leaders are not that service oriented oftentimes, although vignettes of exemplary ones are told about some of our famous forefathers. During the American Revolutionary War, a company of soldiers under the command of a captain was building a fort out of a pile of heavy logs. While wrestling with a log which was to form the capstone

that was really too heavy for the men to handle, the captain kept yelling at his men, “heave it up,” while he himself stood by with his hands on his hips.

Suddenly a stranger in everyday clothing rode up on horseback, and seeing the soldiers sweating and struggling with the log, he stopped and asked the captain why he was not helping his men. “I am an officer,” was the indignant reply.

With that the stranger leapt off his horse, took off his coat, and helped the exhausted men put the heavy log in place. Then, as he was about to ride

away, he said to the captain, “Next time you need help, just call on me. My name is George Washington, and I am Commander in Chief of The United States Army!”

Pastor Hal Lucock noted that in an old Methodist hymnal there was a hymn entitled, “Jesus Demands My All.” But the title was followed by an asterisk and a footnote that said, “For an easier version see Number 438.”

We often are looking for Number 438, an easier way out. Giving our all is

not at the top of our agendas. Giving a tithe is often well above our plans as well.

But Jesus is challenging us along with his disciples to consider the ultimate things, the eternal things, when we live our lives. How have we served others? How have we diminished ourselves in order to make the lives of others more livable? In doing that, in making other's lives more livable, we become greater.

One of my Sunday School students in another church had an older brother. When I was introduced to him, he said,

"My name is Peter, and I am the greatest." Even Peter was joining the ranks of James and John!

How do we seek real priority and greatness? Is it not through servanthood?

Pastor Glen Morrison said in a job interview he was asked about his fluency in French. Glen remembered he had learned how to order a hamburger in French and to say a few other things in the language. So he replied that he did have fluency in French. Then the interviewer switched to speaking in

French, and the embarrassed Glen found he would not be getting that job.

Little children in Sunday School were asked, “Who will be wearing the biggest crown in heaven?” To which they chimed back, “The one with the biggest head!!!”

And indeed that is what many think: if we have a good self-esteem, then we will be seen as being the greatest or the best. But the reason for a secure self-valuation, a secure self-valuation, is how we have benefited others by our lives,

not by how we have overcome lesser achievers.

The pipe organ at the Pacific Ocean Studios on Clement Street in San Francisco has a special “stop” or button. By pushing this button the organ makes the sound of applause. And with the crescendo pedal the applause can be raised to the level of a standing ovation.

Maybe we are seeking such a button for our lives. A little crescendo of applause would make us feel quite proud.

But let us strive for the applause of the angels, their perhaps unheard applause during our lifetimes. How can we get that applause except through following our and their Lord? By serving Jesus through his teachings we can find the kudos of the Eternal One who dwells in heaven.

Mary Kay Ash of Mary Kay Cosmetics said, “Everyone has an invisible sign hanging from [their] neck saying, ‘Make Me Feel Important.’”
“Never forget this message when

working with people,” she said. Make them feel important.

A Hollywood starlet is said to have said, "Flattery will get you everything, Darling."

Zig Ziglar, the famous motivational speaker's defining quote is, "You can have everything in life you want if you will just help enough other people get what they want." "You can have everything in life you want if you will just help enough other people get what they want."

Our platitudes and flattery do have the desired effects sometimes. But it is our humble service that gets us the eternal rewards.

Washington Gladden's well-known hymn goes, "O Master, let me walk with Thee in lowly paths of service free." Washington Gladden was for some time the religious editor of the New York "Independent" newspaper in the late 1800's. He editorialized against Boss Tweed and the Tweed Ring in New York City, an unpopular thing for a religious editor to do. Later he became an

outspoken preacher on labor-management concerns and focused on the social implications of the gospel. He took his Christianity to be essential to correcting the ills of the society of his time and place.

There is an Aesop fable of the fox and the crow. The crow had gathered up a tasty morsel of meat in his beak. The fox wanted a bite. So he said, “Crow, how beautiful is your voice. It is one of the most melodic of all the birds.” The crow, bursting with pride, opened his beak and began to sing, and the morsel

fell to the ground. The fox quickly gathered up the meat and ran away.

Our pride can indeed get in our way of being the servant Christians we are called to be.

Our God is one who chooses to serve, not just to be worshipped and adored. Our God serves.

John Mackay, former president of Princeton Theological Seminary, said the two symbols of Christianity are the cross and the towel. Jesus suffered and died for our sins on the cross, but first he

washed our dirty feet with his own hands and dried them with his own towel. The Maundy Thursday action becomes the ultimate model for us as Jesus' modern-day disciples. Whose feet have we washed this week? How have we selflessly served others? Where have we let our love show above our self-esteem?

A great Scottish preacher died and appeared at the gates of heaven. He expected to find the doors immediately flung open, but there was a hesitancy. Hadn't anyone heard of all the hoards he had preached to in his grand

congregations? Well, apparently not. But one angel said to him, ‘Are you the one who fed the little sparrows in your garden each day?’ To which the great Scot mumbled, ‘Why, yes, I did feed the sparrows.’ And the angel replied, ‘Come on in then to meet the Lord of the sparrows.’

Perhaps our sparrows are little children whom we care for, or elderly friends we tend to, or someone in distress who can find no one else to turn to. Have we fed the sparrows?

The way of the cross is not the way of fame and fortune. The way of the cross means suffering and stress and challenge and perseverance towards a loftier goal than anyone else outside the church would ever imagine or hope for.

I am convinced that each of us has phenomenal God given gifts. Few of us however exercise our giftedness. We hold back; we hide our gifts under a barrel; we withhold our gifts to others. And in time our gifts atrophy, shrivel up and die away, and are lost. What we need to do is to get busy and use our

God-given abilities in the building up of the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. We need to exercise our powers of love, of caring, of a positive attitude, of confidence to make a difference in our world and in the world of others. Only then will we be able to rescue the world from its cynicism and depression. Our love should be a beacon of hope for the lost world.

Thanks be to God who loves us all.

Amen.