

Mark 10:35-45 9.30 am

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord our strength and our redeemer Amen

The story about James and John asking for favours from Jesus tells us a good deal about Mark's character and honesty.

Matthew in chapter 20 retells this story about James and John asking for favours, but in his version the request for the first places is made not by James and John, but by their mother Salome.

Matthew must have felt that such a request was unworthy of an apostle, and, to save the reputation of James and John, he attributed it to the natural worldly ambition of their mother.

This story from Mark's gospel then, also shows us the accuracy of Mark in his recording of the event.

Tradition has it that when a court painter painted the portrait of Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell was afflicted with warts on his face.

Thinking to please him, the painter omitted the warts in the painting. When Cromwell saw it, he said, "Take it away! And paint me warts and all!"

This is probably the origin of the saying, which means that everything must be recorded, both the good and the bad. But why did Matthew change the story, and as it were leave out the warts.

Matthew was writing his gospel slightly later than mark; we know that because Matthew and Luke used a good deal of Mark in their gospels.

Also by the time the gospels are written it is possible that a kind of halo of sanctity had become attached to the disciples.

Matthew did not wish to show James and John guilty of worldly ambition, and so he puts the request into the mouth of their mother rather than into the mouths of James and John.

Mark was recording the story how it was, but he was also telling us that the disciples were not a collection of saints, but a collection of ordinary people who were trying to make sense of what was going on around them, and quite often getting it wrong, while Matthew was trying to protect their image as members of the chosen twelve.

But there was yet something else which may have made them ask for special treatment.

It could well have been just worldly ambition on their part, the same as their mother's, but in their case, it may have been inspired as the result of how Jesus had been treating them, because more than once Jesus had already made them a bit special, a part of his inner circle, the chosen three.

If you remember Jesus took Peter and James and John along with him and brought them up into a high mountain all by themselves, and he was transfigured and his clothes became dazzling white, and it was there that they saw Elijah and Moses standing at Jesus' side, and they heard God speak.

And in the raising of Jairus' daughter in Mark chapter 5 we read, "He took the child's father and mother and his three disciples, Peter, James and John and went into the room where the child was lying".

So Jesus had already treated them as special, and they had merely misread the situation, and were trying to extend what they thought was their special relationship.

And finally Jesus **wanted** the question asked; he **wanted** James and John to ask the question and he also wanted the other disciples to be aware of what was going on, because he wanted to teach them a significant lesson.

So perhaps they can be forgiven for asking such a question, but it is important to note that Jesus didn't just put them down and humiliate them, rather, as a good teacher and leader he empowered them by reasoning with them, so that they had a better understanding of what the future held in store for them.

But it is also interesting to note that even at this stage in their relationship with Jesus that they could clearly see that Jesus was destined for a great adventure, and that they wanted to be a part of it.

But here they may have thought more in terms of worldly things rather than of heavenly things for their adventure.

In reply to the question, Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking". "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

And they said to him, "We are able." And 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".

We are now at the heart of the passage, the lesson that Jesus wanted them and us to understand.

The first expression Jesus uses is, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink".

The cup is a metaphor for the life and experience that God hands out to all of us, which is different for each of us.

For example Psalm 23 reads, "You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows".

In this case the Psalmist is saying that God has been very gracious and generous to him, to the point of being so generous that the psalmist is overwhelmed by God's kindness to him, God's cup of kindness and generosity he says is overflowing.

But in Isaiah 51 verse 17 we read, "Awake, awake. Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath", God's cup in this case is not quite so palatable.

It is the cup of judgment for wrongdoing and woe betide anyone who receives God's cup of wrath; but Jesus' cup was a cup of service, and he drank deeply from it, and we all know that his cup led to him giving his life on the cross at Calvary, so that we might live.

And the second expression was, "And the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized".

Now Jesus was totally immersed in the river Jordan at his baptism, and we often hear of people being totally immersed in things, a person can be totally immersed in a book, a person can be totally immersed in debt, as indeed is happening all round us today.

When Jesus was baptized into God's service on earth he was totally immersed in his work for God.

Jesus was saying to James and John that they too would be totally immersed in their work for God as well, and that they too would give their lives in service; that's what Jesus meant by saying you will be baptized into my baptism.

Yes said Jesus, you will drink my cup and be baptized into my baptism, but at the time that Jesus said those words to them they couldn't have foreseen the full implication of what it meant.

James, for example, died very early on for his faith at the hands of Herod Agrippa see Acts Chapter 12.

We too have been given a cup to drink and we too have been baptized into God's service, and our baptisms have the same conditions as those of James and John.

But to James and John's request to sit on his left and right in his glory, Jesus replied, "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.

And we know that when Jesus sat in his glory on the cross he had two bandits one on his left and one on his right who were crucified with him.

And we know that one of them insulted Jesus and told him that if he was the son of God to get them down from there, but the other bandit rebuked the other bandit and asked Jesus to remember him, and Jesus said to him that today you will be with me in paradise.

St Paul wrote, "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God.

The defining moment of Christianity was and is the cross of Christ; without Christ's death on the cross Christianity is hardly more than a moral code.

Christ's death on the cross was the key moment of joyful exchange. Christ, who wasn't guilty, took and faced God's punishment for our guilt, so that we could be forgiven and live.

God is now reconciled and receives into grace and forgiveness of sins all those who believe and trust in His Son.

And then from verse 42 Jesus explains how we are to respond to his teaching, and how we are to respond to our experience of him in our lives; we are not to lord it over other people, but rather we are to become their servants, and as servants of the Lord we are to lead people to Christ.

We are to be servant leaders, and if that sounds daunting please don't be anxious, because God will not give us a job to do before he gives us the tools to do it with, and the greatest of all the tools that God gives us is faith and trust in him.

God's greatest gift to us is faith and trust in him. God is not asking us to earn his love or acceptance in any way.

God's acceptance and forgiveness of us is received simply through our faith, and when that has sunk in as a true reality, then we will realise that all we have to do is get on with our lives in the sure and certain knowledge that our salvation is secure.

It is then from this certainty of our security, through faith, that we will get the energy to bring other people to the joy that we experience of knowing and trusting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we sit let us pray

You came, Lord Jesus Christ, to teach us the way of life that you require, to show us how we are to serve you and our neighbours; make us receptive to your teaching and to your gospel, and help us to live a life of service to you, without counting the cost, to the glory of your name.

Amen