



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

## “PRAISE GOD FROM WHOM ALL BLESSINGS FLOW”

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 53:4-12; Mark 10:32-52

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, April 7, 2019  
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Mark 10:32-52

They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and 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; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.’

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.’

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here.’ And they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take heart; get up, he is calling you.’ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ The blind man said to him, ‘My teacher, let me see again.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has made you well.’ Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

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Let us pray...

Almighty and Everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be pleasing, acceptable, and even joyful in your sight, for you are our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

We have all come to expect certain things in life. With April 15 just around the corner, I find myself recalling anew a quote from a letter that Benjamin Franklin wrote many years ago. It reads: "Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes."

Poet Percy B. Shelley felt that the one thing on which we can count on in this life of ours was "change," and he describes that conviction beautifully in a poem called "Mutability," which translated means just that, change.

*For, be it joy or sorrow, the path of its departure still is free: man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow; nought may endure but mutability!" which translated mean change.*

Change – death – taxes. I do think we can count on those things, but this morning, and especially as it relates to matters of faith, I'd like to add to that list of things that we can expect in this life of ours, the classic conviction that, when given the opportunity, we, frail and fallen as we are, we are always inclined to put ourselves first.

The great reformer, John Calvin, understood very well our human propensity to focus on ourselves. So much so, that he summed up the whole of the Christian life as: "the denial of ourselves." And in our New Testament Lesson this morning, James and John demonstrate just how difficult denying ourselves really is. Clearly, they didn't seem to understand the path that Jesus was called to take. It was as if they expected a completely different turn of events, which is somewhat strange seeing as this was not the first time that they had heard Jesus say that he was going up to Jerusalem, where he would be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and condemned to death.

This was not the first time that they had heard Jesus say that he would be handed over to the Gentiles, and that they would mock him, and spit on him, and flog him, and kill him, but that after three days he would rise again. Perhaps because they didn't seem to understand what Jesus had said about his death and resurrection the first or the second time, he tells them again for a third time.

And maybe it was their own expectations which got in the way of them truly grasping who Jesus was and what it was he came to do. After all, throngs of people were continually following him. I mean, he was the headliner of the day! Maybe that's what got in their way of seeing Jesus as the suffering servant as foretold by the prophet Isaiah. For in our reading this morning, our Old Testament Lesson says: "He was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth."

Now, it's not as if James and John have absolutely no frame of reference for what is about to happen, because, even though they don't seem preoccupied at all with the divine spotlight

which was clearly shining on that place of persecution and scorn, they at least had enough sense about what was brewing to ask Jesus – not unlike the Prodigal Son from last week, to ask him for their share of the inheritance, as it were. And in doing so, these two disciples of our Lord, begin to live into that very human expectation that I mentioned a few moments ago; because, instead of seeking God’s kingdom, instead of paying attention to heavenly things, they focused on human things...they focused on themselves.

“Teacher,” they say, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And from the mouth of Jesus - the one who knows all too well the limits of both their question as well as their understanding - he responds in this way: “What is it you want me to do for you?”

I remember, as a child, learning about the life of King Solomon, and how he was asked a similar question and how he asked for wisdom...and what a positive request that ended up being, not only for himself but also for the history of God’s people. And yet, here we have a very different request from two of Jesus’ closest disciples – two men whom Jesus had dubbed, “the sons of Boanerges” or “Sons of Thunder.” And though there’s no real explanation in scripture for why Jesus gave them that title, it hasn’t stopped the church from speculating...and oftentimes it makes those speculations, at least in part, upon this episode of their life.

Indeed, far be it from a mild and humble request...theirs comes boldly from a self-serving place/a self-righteous place. “Grant us to sit,” they say, “one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” It breaks my heart but it also gives me hope to hear James and John ask that question.

It breaks my heart because James and John so clearly reveal that, instead of seeking the kingdom of God, they were seeking the kingdom of self. The hope, for me, however, resides in the knowledge that the disciples were human, just like you and me – no better and no worse. We can learn from them and we can learn from another man who comes onto the Biblical scene beginning at verse 46. Bartimaeus is described for us as a blind beggar, and, when he hears that Jesus is passing by, he calls out to Jesus using a specific title, “Son of David.” Several people try to quiet him down, but Bartimaeus just yells louder: “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Upon hearing the man, Jesus stops and says, “Call him here.” There must be quite a commotion, because Bartimaeus doesn’t hear Jesus. Someone else has to get him the message: “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.”

The Bible tells us that Bartimaeus throws off his cloak, gets up and goes to Jesus; and notice...notice what Jesus says to him when they are finally standing face to face! It is virtually the same question that he asked James and John -- “What do you want me to do for you?” Bartimaeus could have asked for anything in the world - just like James and John – but he limited his request to the one thing he needed the most, “My teacher, let me see again.”

What an amazing difference between those two stories...those two requests. When Jesus asks James and John, “What do you want me to do for you?” they answer, “Grant us to sit, one at

your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” But when Jesus asks Bartimaeus the same question he answers, “My teacher, let me see again.”

The difference between those two stories is striking – and interestingly enough, it really does have everything to do with that which is between those two stories. Because you see, sandwiched between James and John and Bartimaeus, is what may be the defining moment in Mark’s Gospel; for, in those verses that fall between those two stories, Jesus calls his disciples together and teaches them by his words and by his example about the truest measure of greatness.

Listen again to what Jesus says beginning in verse 43: “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 as a ransom for many.”

I don’t know about you, but I can’t help but imagine Jesus standing before his church even this day and asking us the same question...“What do you want me to do for you?”

So, tell me, are we going to scramble for the best seats in the kingdom or are we going to ask to see? And I’m not talking about physical sight! I mean, are we going to ask to be able to see with eyes of faith?

I dare say that there is within each one of us a James and a John. Oh, we can see well enough, alright; but, too often, we see only ourselves and we neglect the grander purposes of God. We get so caught up on being first that we fail to understand what it could possibly mean to be the servant of others.

There is also within each one of us a Bartimaeus, a blindness that is in need of God’s healing...and when we are humble, and when we call to God – and when it is justice that we rightly deserve – oh, praise be to God, what we get is mercy, what we get are eyes that begin to see what really matters.

And how do we know that our vision is becoming a little bit clearer day by day? How will we know that we are seeing the world rightly and living in the world more faithfully? Well, one thing is for sure...we will begin to look a little more like servants.

This we have learned from the one about whom it has been said... “Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form”, the Bible says, “he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”

This is the same one about whom Isaiah declared: “Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.” Ah, but Isaiah continues, “For he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.”

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us!” Oh, dear friends, he already has! Is there anything else God can do for us? He may be asking that question, but rest assured the answer Jesus is looking for will have a whole lot more to do with God’s Kingdom, than it has to do with ours!

Let us pray...

Loving God, may we, by your Spirit, know what it means to seek your kingdom and not our own...may we know what it means to deny ourselves and to serve both you and neighbor. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*\*The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.*