

“Spiritual Freedom to Be Bridled”

October 24, 2021
York United Ministries
Worship Service at King City United Church
Rev. Andrew K. Lee

Prayer for Illumination

O God, your Word gives us counsel for our understanding. Enable us to receive it today, in the name of your son, our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Reading

Mark 10:35-45 The Request of James and John

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.”

This is the Word of Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God.

< Time for the Children in All of Us >

Dance with the Spirit early in the morning; walk with the Spirit throughout the long day. Work and hope for the new life a-bornin', listen to the Spirit to show you the way!

Hello, my friends who are young at heart; let's listen to the word of God and the voice of the Holy Spirit who is talking to you today.

The Bible story I'd like to share with you now is from the story of Jesus and his disciples, especially James and John. James and John were brothers in a family and became Jesus' disciples. Following Jesus, they dreamed a great vision because they noticed Jesus' excellence and power. They even thought that Jesus would be the King of Israel. So they thought if they stuck to Jesus, they would be in high positions of the new nation when Jesus became a King. I think most of Jesus' 12 disciples would think that way. The disciples wanted to be in a high position in the new nation, but they tried to hide their desire. They just had inner competition, counting their points from Jesus.

But one day, James and John decided to make sure with Jesus about their high positions in the future kingdom. They said, "Jesus, my lord, we are going to do whatever you ask; anything we can do for you, anything! We are loyal; you've seen that. Order anything to us; then we'll do. Instead, we ask you one thing. Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." When other disciples heard what James and John said, they were really furious. Why were they furious? Because they also wanted to ask that to Jesus, but the two brothers just store a march on them. All were full of tension on Jesus' answer.

Jesus knew the disciples' hearts. They all wanted to become influential in the future. Jesus slowly opened his mouth; "You do not know what you are asking. I am not going to be a King in the world. Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. And only God will appoint the people who will sit my right and left." When James and John heard Jesus answer, they turned red because they were so ashamed. And the rest of the disciples were somewhat relieved and, at the same time, perplexed. The new kingdom that Jesus was bringing was not a nation of oppressive secular power but a nation of loving and serving.

My friends, when you love and serve other than yourself, God will be pleased because Jesus' teaching is working in you. When you help others, the Holy Spirit will also help you. Trust God, trust the power in you. And do what God says in pure hearts. Then divine blessing will be upon you. God bless you, my friends.

<Reflection>

When we imagine the scene of the passage today, it is uncommon. What kind of relationship was that between Jesus and the disciples? James and John today initiated the conversation with Jesus. They used words of a polite manner, but their request was not. They said, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." Their request sounds unfair and unbalanced; they request what they want. And they want not for Jesus' benefit but for theirs. "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." Again, they start polite words, but the contents are in direct demand for their own glory. How could this request be possible for them? They are anxious to preoccupy the advantageous position in the Kingdom of the Messiah Jesus.

The mother of James and John, Salome, feels the same. So, in the Gospel of Matthew, Salome came to Jesus and asked him to offer the high positions. "Say that my two sons may sit, one at Your right side and one at Your left side, when You are King."^[1] Particularly in the Gospel Mark, they appear as representatives of the Twelve.^[2] So they think they are entitled to sit on the first and second highest ranks, representing the Twelve. Their request so directly serves their benefits. If I were Jesus, I would scold them because they ask with an intolerable misunderstanding of the Kingdom of God and Jesus' sacrifice to come.

Certainly, their conception of a hierarchical structure of the kingdom comes from their own social context. The Israelites lived under the Roman Empire, so the emperor compulsively ordered all the people in the colony. They dreamed of their high rank and the authoritative power over the people. We cannot blame them because modern people also have the hierarchical concept, wanting to possess power. It is like an instinct that serves human self-interest and comfort.

Jesus has the power but doesn't want to be served like a king, rather a servant king, meaning the most humble and serving king. So he explains, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."^[3] In his explanation in today's passage, there is an interesting point. Jesus says, "whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all."^[4] I repeat, "whoever wishes to become great among you must be your **servant**, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be **slave** of all." There are two important nouns, "servant" and "slave," and the Greek Bible also has different words – *diakonos* and *doulos*.

The nuance of the two terms is similar but different. *Diakonos*, a servant in the New Testament, refers to a voluntary dedication when it is used for deacons and ministers in the Early Church. *Doulos*, a slave, on the contrary, is employed for compulsory service. We are well aware that the two words are of discipleship, but the ability and intensity of the words show the layers in Jesus' word: "whoever wishes to become great among you must be your **servant**, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be **slave** of all," meaning, if you want to be great, you must be a servant, and if you want to be the primo, you must be slave of all. Jesus implies *diakonos* (servant) is a call to a life of serving others than self, while *doulos* (salve) is a call to become a slave of the whole world and, therefore, of Jesus.

Whether the layered explanation of Jesus' discipleships are *diakonos* or *doulos*, we feel uncomfortable because, in any cases, we are asked to give ourselves to others; our time, our efforts, our resources, and our emotion. It can't be not an easy task, but we are called to do so. Jesus exemplifies himself to show the true discipleship of a serving servant and a serving slave when he takes the cross of Golgotha. However, his crucifixion was not forced voluntary. He voluntarily serves the world; he didn't have to, but he did. He freely chose to serve. In Christianity, serving others is not an additional appendix but an essential factor, and it's also true for human societies.

I'd like to share another experience in my BMOQ in Quebec. The candidates were trained in the field and in the camp, called "garrison." In garrison, there are pods. And each pod has 3-5 people sharing a washroom and a small hallway. At the end of the first week of training, we were supposed to get a pod and room inspection. This is like, a commander's checking all our possessions and the cleanliness in our residential area.

However, their standard of cleanliness was beyond our imagination. I remember that I swiped and cleaned the hard floor more than five times with wet baby wipes, but the inspectors found a tiny little amount of dust on the floor just beside the bed frame and checked "failed." We all were so dismayed, and we knew that any type of punishment such as pushups would be given. I do not worry about pushups or squats; I was very prepared for that. But I was concerned about the level of their anger and the candidates' subsequent mood of fear. Later, we candidates found that the punishments were not avoidable and were designed for us to do so. In other words, whether the residence was clean or not, we were doomed to be roasted. Therefore, all we had to do was "do" whatever we were asked. The problem is, we don't have enough time to clean the entire area and to make bedding according to the manual. We failed the inspection several times and gradually found that an individual cannot do everything. Instead, cooperation is essential to pass the inspection.

In my pod, we had three people who voluntarily decided to share their excellence and skills. One person, named Donald, voluntarily helped make all the beddings, the other, named Shawn, voluntarily cleaned the bathroom and the common room, and I voluntarily helped them to fold their shirts and socks. No one forced us to do that, but we did. After cooperating, everything looked perfect. The rooms and pod looked flawless, the bedding looked like an IKEA display, and the shirts and socks looked like a Ralph Lauren display. So the result of the inspection? Passed. We voluntarily served each other: We didn't have to, but we did. And the result was perfect. Serving others is essential for survival in this context. Then what about Christianity? In Christianity, this voluntary consideration is the gist of Christian spirituality and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Among the influential modern theologians, I like Ronald Rolheiser. A Canadian theologian, Ronald Rolheiser, the president of Oblate theological seminary in Atlanta, holds that Christians are being tied not by self-interest but by the holy belt of the Holy Spirit. According to his book *The Holy Longing*, this belt means a calling by the Holy Spirit. This belt invites and pushes Christians to an unexpected situation that they may not want or be familiar with. And when Christians accept the invitation, then the power of the Holy Spirit will pour on them.

Rolheiser takes an example to explain it. He writes; "a few years ago, there was an accident by an unskilled driver who was not able to control the steering wheel. The driver ran over a high school student. In a few minutes, she would die because of shock and multi internal organ damage. Then all of a sudden, about twenty people on the street stopped to lift the vehicle and saved the student's life."

How could this amazing thing happen if we, human beings, were only motivated by our own individual self-interest? We take action in order to respond properly to our self-interest. However, we also take action in order to respond to divine calling, putting aside our self-interest. We, humans, are such mixed creatures, and Rolheiser points out that these human actions that do not come with self-interest are the incidents of the fastened divine belt.

We are fastened and bridled, and this tie comes to us. And we choose to serve and to be a slave, like Jesus. For God, a great person is a serving person. Yes, of course, we have the freedom to do whatever we want. And yet, we know that we have spiritual freedom to choose to do it or choose to do more voluntarily.

This is like, in our daily life, if you were asked to bring the laundry basket to the basement. So you carry the heavy basket to the laundry room, and while you're in the basement you remember you put away the hot pack in the basement. Now you get the idea to bring it to your spouse to soothe your spouse's back pain, so you decide to try to find the hot pack, diligently digging the messy basement and bring it to your spouse for relieving the pain. Bringing the hot pack to your spouse is a must? Is it mandatory? No it is not; you don't have to, nobody forced you to do so, and yet you freely and voluntarily decide to do so. When we do that, we may gradually understand the works of the Holy Spirit and the love of God. Of course it is a simplified story that can be easily found in our daily life.

Then how about this? "Whoever hits you on the right side of the face, (voluntarily) turn so he can hit the other side also. If any person takes you to court to get your shirt, (voluntarily) give him your coat also. Whoever makes you walk a short way, (voluntarily) go with him twice as far." [5] That is how we drink the cup that Jesus drinks or be baptized with the baptism that Jesus is baptized with. Look for the cup and the baptism of Jesus in your daily life, then God of power and wisdom will be followed.

Let us pray silently.

[1] Matthew 20:21.

[2] Mark 1:29, 3:17, 5:37, 9:2, 13:3, and 14:33.

[3] Mark 10:45.

[4] Mark 10:44.

[5] Matthew 5:38-41.