

Pastor T.C. Arnold
St. James the Elder Day
Mark 10:35-45
July 25th, 2010

There was no indication that life as he knew it would change that day. He was sitting beside the Sea of Galilee with his brother, John, mending their nets. They look up and see Peter and Andrew. They were with a stranger. That stranger would call out to he and John a simple command – the same words posed to Peter and Andrew just a few minutes earlier. The stranger said, “*Follow me.*” Any rational human being knows what the reaction and result to that request should be: “Are you kidding? I have a family to feed. This is my lively-hood. This is all I know and have. I can’t just leave.”

There was no indication that life as he knew it would change that day. But for James, it most assuredly did. For some reason – for reasons that aren’t rational to most – James and John did what Peter and Andrew did. Without argument or discussion, James and his brother John left their boat, their fishing equipment and even their father behind and followed Jesus.

Life changed for St. James, known to us as the Elder, that day. It wasn’t rational. It cannot be easily explained. But there had to be something there – something beyond reason. It was more than just a good idea to follow Jesus that day. It was more than just curiosity that took hold of James and the others. There had to be more. And it can’t be explained in any other way than to call it, “faith.”

From that day forward Jesus became the focus of James’ life. It is also evident that James held a special place in Jesus’ life as well. Besides being one of the twelve, James was with Peter, Jesus and John on that Mount of Transfiguration. James was one of the privileged to witness the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law and the raising of the daughter of Jairus. James was also one of the three that Jesus took aside in the Garden of Gethsemane and called them to watch and pray with Him. Jesus said, “*My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here and watch with me.*”

And maybe, because of these reasons, James and John had the audacity to approach Jesus with a demand – not a request – but a demand. First they said, “*Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.*” James and John are telling their Lord, “Do what I ask.” Does this seem backwards to you? I would have guessed that Jesus would be angry at such a bold statement. But He wasn’t. He simply asks, “*What do you want me to do for you?*” Then James and John say, “*Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.*” This is yet a second bold demand. Jesus responded in the kindest way, “*You do not know what you are asking.*”

Here’s the problem – and Jesus knew the problem. Jesus was right in saying, “*You don’t know what you are asking,*” but maybe not for all the reasons you might think. You might think Jesus said this only because those positions were not His to grant. That’s true and that is what it says in verse 40. But there is more. Jesus says, “*You do not know what you are asking,*” because they had the wrong idea about our Lord’s Kingship. They didn’t see the cross in Jesus’ future. All they saw was an earthly throne. They wanted to sit in the seat of prestige and honor – to the left and to the right of the King who rules His kingdom from a throne. But Jesus knew that His throne would be a cross. So He says, “*You don’t know what you are asking.*”

Jesus would then ask them if they could drink the cup that He drinks. With confidence, James and John say, “Yes.” But they thought that Jesus was talking about all the responsibility that comes with sitting at the right and the left of the King who rules His kingdom from a throne. But Jesus knew it would be different. Jesus said, “*You will indeed drink the cup that I drink...*” That cup would point to the cross and not a throne. That cup was death – the same cup that Jesus drank from for the sake of the world. Acts chapter twelve tells us that James was one of the first martyrs

of the Church. King Herod Agrippa I killed him with a sword in an early persecution of the Church. James got the cup – but not the way he thought.

Our folly tends to reflect the life of the man we hear about today – St. James. We think we know what the Lord will do. We think we know what the Lord says... yet we don't. Don't get me wrong – we do know what He says when He gives us the law... You shall not have any other gods... You shall not bear false witness... and so on. We do know what He says when we hear from the Gospel of John, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...*" We clearly know what that means. But when life gets a little crazy (or a lot crazy) and we think the Lord will work in one way or the other... or we think He is not listening or doesn't care. In reality the opposite is true.

St. James was not aware of what Jesus would do – what He meant about being a king. Sometimes we are not aware of how God provides for us. There are times bumps and bruises occur along the way. We might think, "God, why have you given me these difficult situations to navigate in my life? I don't need this right now." But all the time, no matter what, our Lord is in control of the situation. Sometimes we think we know what is best for us. Sometimes when we ask our Lord to take care – we think we are going to be seated at the right or the left of our Lord in His kingdom. But the Lord has something else in mind. Instead of the throne, He might be thinking of the cross. It may not be what we expect, but the Lord knows – He knows you and knows how to take care of you. Beloved in the Lord – He knows better than you. And He knows that we need the cross instead of the throne. Just as you would expect, the cross is harder than the throne. It is much more difficult and painful. It's not always an easy ride, being a Christian. It's not about the glory of sitting on our Lord's left or on His right.

Life does not hand us special privileges because we are Christians. As a matter of fact, sometimes our road is tougher. There will be no earthly thrones for you. You will not have what James and John wanted. Our Lord has in mind something far greater for you. I thank God that He does. He knows better. He knows the cross for us. He knows the suffering and punishment that we will never have to endure. He knows a better throne – one that stands above the city of Jerusalem on the top of a hill called Calvary. That's our throne and it was Jesus up there and not us. Thank God! That's the day that changed our lives.

There was no indication that life as he knew it would change that day. Not for a simple fisherman like James and not for you. Not for you, when you received that phone call that changed your life. Not for you, when you heard the news from your doctor that would mean things will never be the same again. Not for you, when the job you thought you would be at for the rest of your life suddenly doesn't exist anymore. There is no indication at times – it just happens – and it changes everything.

Where is God? We know He is on the throne and in control. But we don't see Him there – not when things like this happen. Where is God? He is on the cross, showing you that He knows your suffering. He is on the cross showing you that what you are going through will not be the life-changing event. He is on the cross showing you that His tremendous death is your life changing event. The cross is where it ends. The cross is where life begins. And just think, the whole time Jesus was listening to these demands from James and John – He knew all along. Isaiah the prophet knew all along when he said, "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, declares the Lord. My ways are not your ways.*" (Is. 55:8). The Lord knows... and now... so do we. Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.