

Mark 10:35-45

10:35 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."

10:36 And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?"

10:37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

10:38 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?"

10:39 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;

10:40 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."

10:41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John.

10:42 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.

10:43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,

10:44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

10:45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Proclamation of the Word

I call Shotgun!! Perhaps you have called "Shotgun." As Michael Scott from "The Office" says, "The rules of 'shotgun' are very simple. The first persons to call 'shotgun' when in sight of the vehicle gets to sit in the front seat."

I grew up in a big family, the youngest, with four big brothers. If we were all going somewhere with mom, the real prize was to get the front seat of the station wagon. If you sat up front, you might get to influence which radio station was played. We knew Mom would have it set to 98.9- easy listening. It was the best seat because you could also see where we were going. It was the seat with the biggest windows. And back in the old days, it was the ideal location. Shotgun was closest to the air conditioning vents on a hot South Carolina summer day or nearest the heat on a cold one. That was before someone decided that we could put vents in the back seat.

The problem I had was that I was the youngest, smallest, and slowest. Usually it was just a competition between Rob and Andy, our own James and John. I knew I had no chance. When you are the smallest and youngest, you learn to adapt. (To quote William Shakespeare, "Though she be but little, she is fierce!" from a *Midsummer's Night Dream*) Back in the days of bench seats and before we decided that seat belts were not just optional accessories, but useful and necessary, especially for children, I could strategically wait for my moment and flip over from the back seat and be in position to sit closest to

mom, primo spot in the front, even better than shotgun...unless your mom slams on brakes, and you go flying into the windshield- which happened to me. And also my brothers now say that is what is wrong with me- my brain got addled. This is how brothers show their love. In our family we say, "I kid because I care."

Calling Shotgun- the best position, up front, almost in the driver's seat. That is what James and John want. To sit on the right and left of Jesus would be a privilege. By extension, they would be powerful- Vice-President and Chief of Staff. They would have the ear of Jesus in this new regime where Jesus will reign. Jesus has just predicted his passion- his suffering and death, for the third time now in the gospel of Mark. Jesus, the master of open-ended questions, asks, "What is it you want me to do for you?"

They are upfront. "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

Glory- they want power, position, privilege, and now they want to be close to the glory. Jesus still gets the glory, but they will be closest to it. I love that the disciples can be a mirror of us. Their humanity writ large, their selfish desire and sin on display for all to see. If we are honest, don't we like to also be in the inner circle, have influence, and bask in the presence of power? Call it groupies, fan girls, or just fans, but the temptation to be in the inner circle is not just something James and John wrestled with.

James and John want to be in position so badly, that they will do anything to have it. When Jesus asks if they are able to drink from the same cup....be baptized into Jesus' death, they respond boldly, "We are able." like faithful soldiers pledging fealty to the King, kissing his ring, and making their oath of allegiance.

Ableness- we can get caught up in the "We are able" part. We can try all we want, but because we are human, we will fail sometimes.

We try desperately. But when it comes to following Jesus it seems that our failings seem all the more acute. Why is that? We fail constantly, if we are honest. We fail at work, at parenting, at relationships, all situations that seem easier to admit our shortcomings than when it comes to living up to God's expectations. Putting ourselves first in front of others usually fails. We have collateral damage and conflict. Did you notice the 10 other disciples who got mad at James and John?

In contrast, Jesus says discipleship is about following- trusting, sure in some of our abilities, but more in God's ability. When we trust GOD we can take the form of a servant. We put others needs first, especially the vulnerable- the poor, the oppressed, those without rights, and share from God's abundance. Not lording it over, by contrast, as those who rule the Gentiles. But we can relinquish, open a hand, and share of God's abundance.

I started thinking about all the ways God uses us to serve in just this community sharing God's abundance. Fort Hill church is for Clemson, meaning serving our neighbors in our community. The Holy

Spirit placed us in this location for a purpose. I am reminded of Jeremiah 29:7 which reads, "We seek the welfare of this city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." If I just consider those ministries within a five mile radius, I came up with a very long list. Now I am not bragging on us. But because we Presbyterians hold to the principal "stewardship that shuns ostentation," we sometimes do a terrible job of telling good news. I am saying God is able and willing servants, responsive to the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ, are making a difference for the kingdom of God.

It is easy to list ways we are serving in Christ's name. These are just the ways you are serving the larger Clemson Community- both with our Benevolence portion of our budget, but just as important by giving generously of our time and talents.

- I know disciples who serve weekly through Meals on Wheels- Eva Williamson, Helen Wooten, or Judy Bonham.
- Clemson Community Care which is our local crisis assistance- help with rent, utilities, and a food pantry...so many of us...Stacy Miller
- Family Promise allows us to provide housing and sanctuary for homeless families in Pickens County. That means 50 servants from Fort Hill each time we host. Contact Mary Barron or Linda Gahan.
- Some of you also support the Clemson Free Medical clinic with your time- Janna McKale or Pam Waddle.
- We have a team serve at Our Daily Bread Soup Kitchen regularly- Gary Mohr.
- We support the Clemson Child Development Center for early childhood education and childcare for our neighbors who need that support. Ethel Pettigrew can help
- Habitat for Humanity- building homes and giving families "a hand up not a hand out"- talk to John Sherman.
- Ripple of One impacting families on the edge of poverty gain independence- Larry Sloan.
- We have Scout Leaders impacting young people who have served for over 30 years.
- We have members serving Clemson Community Foundation who support many of these missions- contact Marsha Barker or Bo Crader.
- Safe Harbor- shelter and services for abused women and children- Marcia Sherman and Chris Torres are our organizers for the Cook off in a couple of weeks. You can buy tickets and come be a part of raising funds and awareness about abuse.
- Some of you are mentors with at-risk kids in our Schools or teach them. And others of you faithfully show up every week to serve with our own children and youth. This is outreach. I know one youth advisor Jennifer "Susan" Griffis who just retired as a youth advisor after almost 13 years- unheard of, amazing.

- Presbyterian University Ministry and PSA is a way we serve the students who come to us while in school- our founding mission and purpose.
- At no cost we provide space for Girl Scouts, Alcoholics Anonymous, NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Illness) family classes.

What a great cloud of witnesses.

And that is just what we collectively support as Fort Hill Church through your financial giving and serving in our community alone...that does not count all the ways you are serving inside the church walls and in your daily lives nor how we serve globally or nationally.

Thanks be to God.

These ministries happen because God is able. And we respond in gratitude for the gifts we receive and the salvation we experience in being a part of the Kingdom of God.

We are not always good at telling the story because we want God to get the glory and not point to ourselves. But today we glorify God who through us shows the love of Jesus Christ.

Jesus says- my kingdom is not of this world. I rule differently. You are all kin, and your kinship is defined by Christ Jesus. And you are kin to our neighbors, called to serve. And it happens because of how Jesus defines real living...an abundant life.

James and John called Shotgun, but Jesus called servants. The contrast is clear. My friend Jill Duffield puts it best writing,

James and John want glory. Jesus offers salvation.

James and John want status. Jesus offers relationship.

James and John want power. Jesus offers purpose.

James and John want greatness. Jesus offers life.

James and John want recognition. Jesus offers grace.

James and John want vindication. Jesus offers mercy.

James and John, like gentiles then and now, want to lord it over others.

Jesus offers them, and us, the privilege of serving side by side, with him.

We want to be first, but Jesus reminds us

that we are closest to him when we are among the least and last and lost.

Thanks be to God, no matter what we ask, we have a great High Priest who intercedes for us, and through his death and resurrection, has already given us all we could ever need.ⁱ

Let us pray: You come to us offering abundant life, in this world and the next. Help us hear how you may be calling us to serve as witnesses in your name in our families, our church family, our community, all to further your Kingdom, amen.

ⁱ Jill Duffield, "Looking into the Lectionary, 22nd Sunday after Pentecost," from the *Presbyterian Outlook*.