

Where You Sit

Text:
Mark 10:35-45

A sermon preached by
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Mark 10:35-45

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to [Jesus] and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”³⁶ And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?”³⁷ And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”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?”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;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.”

⁴¹When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John.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.⁴³ But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.⁴⁵ For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”





Take a moment and notice where you're sitting. Look around you. Left, right, behind, in front.



Where are you sitting? Is it where you need to be?



Are you in one of the chairs that just seems to not be designed to be comfortable and you feel like you're going to fall out at any moment?



Are you stuck in the over-analyzing seat where you think you're being judged all the time?



Are you in the ejector seat, ready to bail out at the least hint of a problem?



Are you in a moveable chair which allows you to get from one place to the other freely and with gratitude?

Is where you're seated right now – not in the pew where you plopped yourself this morning, but where you are seated in life. Is it where you're supposed to be? Is it where God asks you to be?

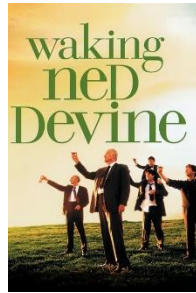


James and John – Jesus called them the Sons of Thunder – didn't seem so sure about where they were sitting. They ask Jesus to agree to do whatever they ask of him. Pretty bold request that obviously got Jesus' attention.

“Okay, so what is it that you want?,” Jesus asks them back.

“We’re not happy with our seats at the banquet,” is the gist of their response. That banquet, the feast, the final meal which Jesus’ message continually reinforced awaits each of us as God’s kingdom is revealed. “We want different seats. Preferably at your righthand and lefthand. You know, right beside you since we’re best buds and all. Old buddy, old pal, Jesus. Just do us this one for old times sake.”

Are you happy with where you sit?



The 1998 movie, *Waking Ned Devine*, is a wonderfully delightful Irish comedy about a tiny village of 52 people which discovers that one of their own has won the lottery – except that that one, Ned Devine, suffered a fatal heart attack while watching the lottery results on the television. Old Ned had no remaining kin so two of his friends decide that he would have wanted the town to share in the £7 million winnings so they devise a plan to defraud the lottery commission and claim the prize.



In a scene near the beginning of the film, Maurice, a little boy about age 10, is in the quaint, country church sitting on the organ bench next to the young priest, Father Patrick, who is filling in for the regular parish rector while he is away on vacation. The dialogue between the young boy and the youthful priest goes like this with the boy starting off with his questions:

“What can ya play?”

“Nothin’, really, I just like messin’ around.”

“Can you play songs about Jesus?”

“No. I wish I could.” (protracted, thoughtful pause)

“So, did he come to ya then?”

“Who’s that?”

“Jesus.”

“Oh, Jesus. Well, he did in many ways. Yes.”

“But did you see him?”

“Well, not exactly, no.”

“But you’re working for him.”

“I am doin’ the best I can.”

“Do you get paid for it?”

“Well, it’s payment more of a spiritual kind, Maurice.”

“Oh, right.”

“Do you think you could be drawn to the church, Maurice?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Well, you never know.”

“I don’t think I could work for someone I’d never met ... and not get paid for it.”

That’s what it means for John and for James *and for us* when we realize we need or, at least want, different seats at the Jesus table. Jesus – whom we have never met – asks us to give up what we have – our comfortable seat – and follow in a different way – do whatever that all implies – and then, spiritual payment aside, we don’t get paid for it. “I’m doin’ my best.”



Jesus responds to the Zebedee brothers. “You don’t know what you are asking. Are you really ready to go through what I will be going through? All that this new way of living entails? Are you

able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”

“Yup. We are able. Just give us those special, comfy seats next to you and we’re ready to go.”

“Yeah, right ...” Jesus had his sarcastic side, you know? “Yeah, right, you’re willing to go through it all even when you have doubts, even when you’re threatened, even when you’re exhausted, even when there’s no food, or people slap you, or others don’t want to believe? You’re ready for all that.”



They’re nodding their heads like a couple of bobble-head Disciples. “Uh huh, uh huh, uh huh.” In hindsight, we know better though.

“The cup that I drink you will drink;”, says Jesus, “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.”

You need to do this following-stuff willingly, self sacrificially, no strings attached. We each get a place at God’s table, no special seats assigned.



“Do you think you could be drawn to this Jesus way?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Well, you never know.”

“I don’t think I could work for someone I’d never met ... and not get paid for it.”

Jesus’ ask is pretty simple. Not so much an “ask” as it is a requirement, a commandment. But it’s quite simple. “Love one another.”



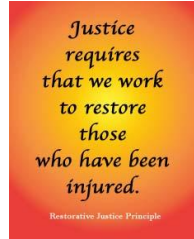
The ask is simple. Our response? Maybe not so much.

“Love one another.”

“Lord, we are able, our spirits are ...” Remember the hymn?

“Wait ... what? Do what? I can’t promise that. I have important grudges I have to nurture, key principles that I can’t give in on, sworn enemies near and far that I can never love.

“I’m able, sure, Lord. But just not willing to give up that important work. I’ve put in quite a lot of time and energy and effort to develop this façade of anger and self-righteous indignation. I can’t just walk away from my life’s work, you know.”



“And then once you love one another,” says Jesus, “you’ll automatically realize that not everyone gets a fair break in this world. And once you realize that, you figure out that what this following another way means is that you have to work for justice.”



January 16, 2009, my friend David Tatgenhorst, pastor of St. Luke UMC, and I and 10 others of us chose a seat. It was a frigid day during the Martin Luther King weekend. We sat on the sidewalk outside a gun shop on Spring Garden Street in Philadelphia to protest the illegal practice of selling guns to those who can’t legally own them.

Afterward, Pastor David reflected on this moment of decision saying “I didn’t want to sit down. It was freezing cold out there. I didn’t want to sit on that sidewalk. I didn’t want to get arrested.”

On one of the coldest days of this year, January 16th I went down to Colosimo's Gun Center to protest their sales of handguns to straw purchasers. The killing of children, of police officers, and of other citizens of our region weighs on my heart, so I cheered when my friends began to hold Jim Colosimo accountable for straw purchases by sitting in front of the door to his gun shop.

After they got arrested, many people left to get out of the cold. There were no cameras or press people left to record what we were doing - to let people know about our actions. I did not want to sit down on that freezing cold concrete myself in front of police who were also cold and grumpy. I thought that it might be better to save my witness for another day when it might get more notice or have more effect.

But then I thought about Dee Smith of North Philadelphia, whose life was shattered when her son Marcus was shot. ... I thought about Chuck Cassidy, a police officer, shot in the head in a Dunkin Donuts in November of 2007 ... I thought about 15 year old Kasey Chambers, an aspiring sports writer and basketball player from Southwest Philadelphia, accidentally shot and killed ... I thought about the NRA and how their well-funded operation keeps even the sanest and simplest gun violence prevention laws from passing.

I thought about how Mr. Colosimo misrepresents himself to people in front of that store as taking every safety precaution he can, saying he doesn't sell to straw buyers when all the evidence shows that he does.

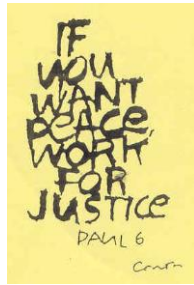
Then I thought about my 13 year old son and what kind of world I want him to grow up in.

I looked at that cold concrete in front of that gun store ... and I sat down.

That seat that day landed our butts in jail and in a courtroom but it was a Jesus seat, a love-one-another seat, a Jesus seat. And it felt good.

Where do you choose to sit? Not where are you stuck sitting. Not where is your life's seat right now. Not where are you hoping to sit – beside God at the table at end of the day. But where do you choose to sit?

It's a decision, this Jesus stuff is.



We each have to decide where we're going to sit in this world.



Do we sit on a throne of lies?



Do we sit on the bench on the sidelines while others get tackled and sacked by bullies in power?



Do we sit in our comfy seats of privilege and ignore the injustice that happens all around us? Do we kick back in life's recliner and prop up our feet on the backs of those who are hunched over by the burdens of the world?

“Lord, we are able,” we respond with James and John. But did they really mean it? Do we really mean it?



This is one of my favorite poems. Maybe you've heard it already.

One night I had a wondrous dream.
One set of footprints there were seen.
The foot prints of my precious Lord
but mine were not along the shore.
But then some stranger prints appeared.
I asked the Lord, "What have we here?
These prints are large and round and neat
but Lord, they are too big for feet."
"My child," he said in somber tones,
"For miles I carried you alone.
I challenged you to walk in faith
but you refused and made me wait.
You disobeyed, you would not grow;
the walk of faith you would not know.
So I got tired, I got fed up
and there I dropped you on your butt.
Because in life there comes a time
when one must fight and one must climb.
When one must rise and take a stand...
or leave your butt prints in the sand.





It is what our baptismal vows require of us. That we choose our seat carefully and voluntarily. It's what I'll be asking my own new granddaughter, Evangeline Rose, in just a few moments. It's what her parents and godparents and all of us will speak on her behalf.

Listen closely to the vows and what they ask of us. Speak willingly and with discernment when you speak the words. These are the ancient and modern words that say to the world, *We Are Able*. Say them today only if you truly mean them.



- *Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?*
- *Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?*
- *Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, races, and abilities?*

- *Will you nurture this child (and all children) in Christ's holy Church?*
- *Do you, as Christ's body, the Church, reaffirm both your rejection of sin and your commitment to Christ?*
- *Will you nurture one another in the Christian faith and life and include all persons in your care?*



We need to choose our seats in this world prayerfully and with an understanding of where those seats are and what they mean and how they position us to do God's work. Choose not necessarily the comfortable seat. Avoid the throne of self-righteousness or any other seat the world might offer you. But choose rather the seat that positions you in a way that you can rise up for justice, that you can do what God asks of each of us, that you can fulfill that requirement of every Jesus-follower – love one another.

Reaffirm your baptismal vows this day. Sit where God needs you to sit.

Amen.