

Jim Gill

October 21, 2018

"First Serve"

Job 38:1-7; 34-41 | Mark 10:35-45 | Hebrews 5:1-10

INTRODUCTION TO JOB 38:1-7; 34-41

Job has been insisting on hearing from God. In this morning's passage his request is answered. Job wants to question God. Instead, God questions Job. Hear the word of the Lord from Job 38:1-7 and 34-41

INTRODUCTION TO MARK 10:35-45

This morning our liturgy and our prayers come from the 24<sup>th</sup> observance of the Children's Sabbath. A few weeks ago we read about Jesus saying, "Let the children come to me and hinder them not for such is the Kingdom of heaven. This morning two of Jesus' disciples are acting like children. Two brothers engaged in sibling rivalry come asking Jesus for the best seats at the table in God's Kingdom. Almost immediately after announcing that he is going to the cross, two out of three of Jesus' closest friends come to him with a request that must have made it even harder for him. Hear the word of God from Mark 10:35-45

Let's pray. Dear Lord, Thank you for this, your word. Open our eyes to see, our minds to understand, our hearts to receive your word. Open my lips to share what you have given to me and prepare us all to be changed so that we may respond to your word through the power of your Holy Spirit. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

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Since this morning we are observing Children's Sabbath I'd like to share begin by sharing what one assignment a first grade teacher once gave to her 6-year-old students. The next day they were to bring in a symbol of their faith. (This was in the days when it was OK to do this.)

The next morning she called on Isaac, who stood up and said, "I am Jewish and this Star of David is the symbol of my religion."

The teacher then called upon Mary, who stood up saying, "I am Catholic and this Rosary is a symbol of my religion."

Next came Bobby.. "I am Presbyterian," he said, and this is a casserole."

Yesterday at the memorial service for Pat Kell our Member Care Committee outdid themselves... although I didn't detect a casserole. There were a lot of goodies and of course Pink Presbyterian Punch. The Member Care Committee's theme song should be our closing hymn this morning, "The Servant Song."

I once attended a luncheon and I was asked to sit with some of the dignitaries, including our Texas State Representative. As I turned to see the three guest speakers I noticed a huge wooden cross on the stage. There were two things about it that caught my eye. The first thing was that it was too short. It was out of proportion to the cross beams. (according to every cross I've ever seen anyway.) The second thing about the cross was that it was on wheels. I said to the State Representative, "If Jesus had had that cross he wouldn't have had to have Simon of Cyrene carry it for him." She laughed.

Jesus' cross was not on wheels. He had to carry that cross and it was heavy. The burden on his heart was even heavier.

It was five days before Jesus' crucifixion, and four days before his betrayal and trial. It was one day before Jesus' second clearing of the temple. It was a few hours before Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Mere moments before the most crucial events in their lives begin to unfold what were Jesus' closest friends doing? They were being themselves, a bickering, petty, bad-tempered quarrelsome lot. How is it that critical moments can be so close at hand and people still manage to get caught up in wondering, "What's in this for me?"

As you read the Gospels you come across numerous occasions when the disciples misunderstand Jesus' teachings, when their actions are inappropriate, when they jump to conclusions that are way off mark. But here is something a little different than their usual blunders. This one took some premeditation.

James and John were a part of Jesus' small group. Time after time Jesus would peel off with three of the 12. When he did, the three he chose to take with him were Peter, James and John.

It was Peter James and John who were allowed to come up the mountain and see witness Jesus' transfiguration. It was Peter James and John whom Jesus took with him to the Mount of Olives to pray just before he was arrested.

James and John, two brothers who left their father's fishing business to follow Jesus, come to Jesus with a request. They not only wanted to be in Jesus small group, they wanted to be Jesus' right hand and left hand man. They wanted cabinet positions! What James and John are asking for is nothing less than the power to command the army of Israel. Rabbis and Scholars at the time taught that the messiah when he came would be the new David, King of Israel. He would rule with a mighty sword and vanquish all of Israel's enemies. The disciples were under the same impression.

So James and John are jockeying for position. But doesn't it seem strange and even a little childish the way they go about it? They demand Jesus say yes to a question they haven't even asked?

Jesus calls the rest of his disciples together and in essence tells them that there is always going to be someone who is a peg above you. The Gentiles are ruled over by local authorities and there are higher officials over them and on up the chain of command it goes, official after higher official after higher official. "Not so with you," Jesus says.

James and John wanted position. They wanted prestige. And ....they wanted power. Notice that the other ten disciples became indignant when they heard what James and John were up to. It was a power play, a strategic maneuver, and the other disciples resented it.

George Bernard Shaw was once asked in what generation he would have preferred to live. The witty Irishman replied: "The age of Napoleon, because then there was only one man who thought he was Napoleon."

Listen to this quote and then I want to tell you who said it: "Alexander, Caesar, and Hannibal conquered the world but had no friends...Jesus founded his empire upon love, and at this hour millions would die for him.... He has won the hearts of men, a task a conqueror cannot do." Do you know who said that? Napoleon.

The very man history records as having one of the largest egos knew what tenuous grounds he stood on. You want the devotion and allegiance of men? Don't be a Napoleon. Don't fight to be leader of all; fight for the least position of all. Strive to be a servant.

When you join the church you give up your season tickets in the bleachers. When you join the church you are given a role, a part to play. No role is more important than any other. To be sure there are still seats in the bleachers that are occupied. Those seats are occupied by those who have yet to join in the adventure that is the church. They are watching just like you used to watch. And our hope, our goal, our mission is to so enjoy playing rather than watching that they will want to leave the bleachers just like you did and are doing.

I want you to know that I know that there are churches out there that have it all together, where you could go and have everything done for you...where you could go and be served. I know that there are churches that may be more exciting or have more to offer than we do. I know that it takes a lot of people serving to make those places run, believe me. I also know there is a lot of room in their bleachers.

I submit to you though, it's much more rewarding to serve. You learn more when you teach than when you are taught. There is great joy in singing and acting and leading and....folding bulletins, and making coffee., and running sound, and moving chairs and providing Christmas presents for those who receive Meals on Wheels and handing out food from the pantry and planning a blessing of the Animals and putting together Thanksgiving baskets yes.....meeting in

committees....and in attending PRESBYTERY meetings and in making pimento cheese sandwiches for a reception after a funeral or memorial service and, this coming Saturday for the men's prayer breakfast even making a known Presbyterian religious symbol—a casserole.

When you choose to give of your time, your talents and your hard-earned money to see to it that this church fulfills its mission of changing lives, growing disciples through the transforming love of Jesus Christ you will be BLESSED!

In 1878, when the Salvation Army was really beginning to make its mark, men and women from all over the world began to enlist. A man who had once dreamed of becoming a bishop in another denomination crossed the Atlantic from America to England to enlist in the Salvation Army instead. His name was Samuel Brengle.

Brengle left a fine pastorate to join William Booth's Army. At first General Booth accepted his services reluctantly and grudgingly. Booth said to Brengle, "You've been your own boss too long." So in order to instill humility in Brengle, he made him work by cleaning the boots of other trainees.

Discouraged, Brengle said to himself, "Have I followed my own fancy across the Atlantic in order to black boots?" Then, as in a vision, he saw Jesus bending over the feet of rough, uneducated fishermen. "Lord," he whispered, "you washed their feet; I will black their shoes."

Samuel Brengle went on to establish the Salvation Army in the United States. At the time of his death, the Salvation Army was thriving in both the United States and in Canada. Just before his death Brengle sent out a short memo to all of his top leaders. This memo had one single word written on it: "Others." 3)

Instead of seeking a position or prestige or power, First Serve. Instead of asking for special seats, First Serve. Instead of wondering what's in it for you, ask what you can do for ....in the dying word of Samuel Brengle's memo to his fellow soldiers in the Salvation army, "Others."

At the lunch when I sat with the State Representative where I saw the cross on wheels there was something else I saw. As I exited the Fellowship Hall I saw on the wall opposite two words. First Serve.

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On this weekend celebrated as Children's Sabbath in congregations across the land, trusting that God hears both the prayers we offer in the silence of our hearts and those we voice together, let us pray for the Church and for the world.

The psalmist praised God as a Mighty Ruler, Lover of Justice.

When I say “Mighty God, Lover of Justice,” let us all respond, “**hear our prayers.**”

Grant, O God, that all who gather in Christ’s name will throw wide our doors and our hearts and lift our hands and voices to proclaim your promise of love and will for justice, especially for those who are young, poor, vulnerable, and oppressed.

Mighty God, Lover of Justice, **Hear our prayer.**

Guide our nation and all of our leaders that they will champion the cause of the children and families most oppressed and govern with truth, compassion, and justice.

Mighty God, Lover of Justice, **Hear our prayer.**

Bless the families of our world, especially the billion who lack the income, clean water, health care or education needed to live into the fullness of life.

Mighty God, Lover of Justice, **Hear our prayer.**

Strengthen us to create a nation and world of justice so that every child may live with plenty and not poverty, with peace and not threatened by violence, surrounded by family, not separated, so that all children have lives of hope, not despair.

Mighty God, Lover of Justice, **Hear our prayer.**

Comfort all who suffer, especially those who are hungry, are victims of violence, or struggle without a job or enough income to meet their needs.

Mighty God, Lover of Justice, **Hear our prayer.**

Gather to yourself all who have died, especially those who died from poverty, violence, and other causes we could have prevented.

Mighty God, Lover of Justice, **Hear our prayer.**

For all people in their daily life and work;  
 For our families, friends, and neighbors, and for those who are alone.  
 For this community, the nation and the world;  
 For all who work for justice, freedom, and peace.  
 For the just and proper use of our creation; ‘  
 For the victims of hunger, fear, injustice, and oppression.  
 For all who are in danger, sorrow, or any kind of trouble;  
 For those who minister to the sick, the friendless, and the needy.

For the peace and unity of the Church of God;  
For all who proclaim the Gospel, and all who seek the Truth.  
For all who serve God in his Church.  
For the special needs and concerns of this congregation.

Mighty God, Lover of Justice, **Hear our prayer.**

Mighty God, we offer you our thanksgiving for the eternal salvation that is ours through obedience of faith in Christ, named our High Priest forever. We are grateful for your patience with our ignorance and error and weakness understood so well by Jesus who gave up his life as a ransom for many. May our willingness to serve rather than be served, be a further expression of our gratitude, Most High, Most Humble, Most Loving God.

Mighty God, Lover of Justice, hear these the prayers of your children and grant them for the sake of your beloved child Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

\*Prayers taken from Children's Sabbath