

“Do you know what you are asking?”

Sermon for Pentecost 21 – October 18, 2015

If you have children, did you know what you were getting into? When I was married, did I know what is involved in supporting, forgiving, sustaining, and celebrating the relationship? (Not much). If you are getting older (anyone exempted?), how many of us know what we are getting into? “You do not know what you are asking,” says Jesus to his disciples. They were asking to sit one on his right, one on his left to share in his glory, and exercise his power.

Let’s back up a bit. The first half of Mark’s gospel, which we’ve been following in the summer and early fall, shows a Jesus of power. He heals, debates, walks the countryside, and attracts followers. The followers are impressed; they want to bask in his glory; they want protection from suffering. We’re now into the second half of the gospel, in which the ways we grasp for power come to the foreground. The disciples hope relating to the right person, soaking up the glory, reading the right book, eating the right foods- *being close to God*- would lift them above suffering. People close to God have it all, don’t they? Influence, righteousness, riches?

God in Christ turns that vision of power inside out and upside down. Blessed is the One who serves. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. Blessed are they who are engaged, who know they *don’t* have it all, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who can say “Our Father who art in heaven, blessed be YOUR name,…” Blessed are we who mourn, who know the compassion of God.

You do not know what you are asking, says Jesus. Rather than up, up and away into benign indifference, the way is further into our life together, into compassion. Christ accepts suffering not as end in itself because he’s into suffering as some kind of masochist, but because in a world of freedom, things often go astray. We act out of fear. We act defensively. We lack hope and trust. We act badly.

Are you able to drink the cup I drink? Is give us this day our daily bread enough to live, and love by? Our father who is in heaven hallowed be your name, yours is the power the victory, and the glory for ever and ever, ... I am privileged to be part of it, to follow in your compassion.

Consider the options when we feel we have been wronged- perhaps by a friend with a rupture in the friendship or a parent who feels betrayed by a child or a child betrayed by a parent. What if one you love has been selfish and dismissive? And we ourselves some of the same. One option is to try to be indifferent to exercise stoic power. “I don’t care, I can get along without you. I’m moving on right away.” Another option is to pull out all the guns you have, unfortunately sometimes literally- or the intellectual weapons of argument, lawsuit, superior reason, and rightness. “I know, I’m right, after all; and I’ll show you one way or another.”

What if I feel wronged - more sinned against than sinning? What if I, more than a hardened heart, more than a right argument or retribution, *share* in the suffering, come to

grieve, mourn, thirst for right relations and realize my estranged friend, spouse, child, or parent, probably endured the very sin I perceive them committing? Christ opens the way of shared suffering, and we are called to follow- so that new life, resurrection, may emerge.

There are dangers. We can play the victim; or find a perverse pride in suffering.

No one of us is called to be a Christian alone. That's why we're here, saying our prayers together and having communion. We are called together into the Body of Christ. No heroes in this business. Christ opens the way for us to become neighbors, friends; mothers, fathers, sons and daughters privileged to be part of the promise, care and spirit God holds for us and in us- in Christ our Lord.