

October 4 2015

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 81

Hebrews 1:1-4

Mark 10:35-45

Sermon *Drinking From the Servant Cup*

Before her death an elderly cousin of my grandfather, who had lost both of her children as adults and had no grandchildren, gave me some items which she held as precious. Two of the items were books about the sinking of the Titanic, which happened in 1912, which she had purchased as a young girl that year. I still have those two books. If I could have found them after my last move I would have brought and shown them to you. I treasure them too. In one of those books there is a strange story of two officers on the Titanic. One of whom had been asked by the Captain to rearrange deck chairs on the ship while it was sinking. Now jealous of the first officer, the second officer started to help the first and a fist fight followed. Meanwhile the ship sank and both were drowned. If you believe that story, I have bridge in Brooklyn that I will sell you at the same time. Now the story about the books and the cousin are true but work with me just a second.

Now Jesus probably considered the altercation between James and John and the other disciples about who would sit at Jesus' right and left hands in heaven in Mark's Gospel is equally as pointless as two men fighting over deckchairs as the Titanic was sinking. I am sure that Jesus wondered what was coming as the two disciples declared, "We want you to do for us whatever we ask of you". It almost sounds childish. It almost sounds as if Jesus is some cosmos Santa Clause or some kind of genie in a bottle. And then the clincher came when they didn't want fame, they didn't want fortune, and they didn't want earthly power. No they went right to the pentacle. They wanted to rule the heavens. They wanted to rule the earth and be with Jesus all eternity. They didn't want to be angels; they wanted to be God himself.

And Jesus gives them a reality check by reminding them they really don't know what they asking for. And then he asked them what seems to be a mysterious question-and in some kind of cryptic language he asks them, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with. And they quickly answer, "We are able" but do they really know? Do they really understand what Jesus is asking of them? Did they really understand what the implications of what their requested are?

Speaking of the topic of baptism it sounds, I think, Jesus is speaking of the sacraments. It sounds as if Jesus is speaking of Holy Communion and Holy

Baptism and in a sense I think he is. Those sacraments define who Jesus is and what he came into the world to do, the two important events in his life. If you remember in his baptism, he humbled himself before John the Baptist in the waters of river Jordan. As he is God's chosen, he did not have to be baptized but did in order to set an example for each one of us. In instituting Holy Communion he gave us a great object lesson pointing in the way in which he humbled himself to have his blood spilt and his body broken for the sake of the world. He could have freely chosen to have not gone through any of it at all.

Jesus was right to say to James and John that they would drink of his cup and to receive his baptism because all of Jesus' disciples would have many difficult humbling days ahead of themselves. He was also right in saying in humility that only God can decide what our ultimate destination in life is going to be. The key word again in all of this is humility. When the other ten became angry with James and John for their arrogance and downright audacity in asking in essence to be like God, Jesus used the incident as a teaching moment. Whoever he said wishes to become great among you must be your servant. Whoever he said that would become great amongst you must become your servant- humility.

One of the things that makes us uniquely human and one of things which adds spice and excitement in life is our ambition; how to better our selves, and to achievement more than the previous generation achieved. Our ambition has created wonderful things, great temples and cathedrals, vast amounts of wealth, the fueled charity, vaccines for polio and measles; the invention of the airplane and computer but on the other hand as history shows, such ambitious can also lead to the insanity that can create an Holocaust as did Hitler during World War II. The arrogance of even the people's elected representatives who feel they are above the law and the greed that can put us in the financial mess that we are still trying to recover from even today.

Obviously Jesus in speaking of servant hood and the drinking of his cup of humility doesn't mean we are to become the world's doormat or we should never want to be more than we are right now. But he did mean to call us to account by saying this that two things matter in this life. First what we do to get where we are going- the journey and secondly what we do with the gifts once we have gotten to the place where we are going because as with rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic anything else in life is pointless. Our gifts are not really ours, we only use them for a time, and then they revert back to God who is the original owner of our gift. And our time on this earth is so infinite, so how we get to where we are going does make a great difference in the great scheme of things. These are things that we are asked to ponder not only in our daily lives, but especially now as we contemplate this special communion Sunday which is celebrated all around the world. How do we reflect on the sacrificial love that God showed us in Jesus along

life's pathway day by day? And secondly how do we use the vast gifts which God has given even the poorest of us to show God's love to other people.

Can you drink of the cup? Can you be baptized with my baptism, Jesus asked. No, they were not the easy questions that the disciples thought them to be. And together we say. AMEN.