

Mark 10:35-45

Called to Drink and Walk in Service

Those of you who like a good Western, or even if you like a great movie, have perhaps seen the movie *The Magnificent Seven*; I'm talking about the original 1960 version, which stars the likes of Yul Brunner, Steve McQueen, Charles Bronson, James Coburn. It's a movie about a village in Mexico which is repeatedly raided by bandits who take what little food the villagers are able to grow, and commit other violent atrocities against the villagers also. After one particularly violent raid, in desperation the villagers gather together all the money they can, which isn't much, and send three men north into the U.S.A. to hire some gunslingers; those men who live on both sides of the law and hire out their services of being able to shoot fast and straight. They hope these men can come and rid the village of these bandits.

In the U.S. they come across Chris, played by Yul Brunner, who despite the small amount of money on offer agrees to get together a group of men who will go down and help the village against the bandits. One of the friends Chris approaches is Harry, who cannot believe the small amount of money he is being offered to risk his life on this job, and so becomes convinced that much more is on offer. Despite Chris's repeated denials, Harry keeps saying, 'Come on, there's more, isn't there? This village is sitting on a treasure trove of gold.' When they get to the village and begin training the villagers to defend themselves and set up their defences, Harry continues to quiz the villagers, including the children, about the gold he is sure they are holding on to and which he believes will be the reward when this job is done.

Of course, because it's a movie, Harry is fatally wounded in the final battle where good defeats evil, and, because it's a western, he dies in the arms of his friend. His final words are (my paraphrase), 'You can tell me now, there really is gold, isn't there?' 'Yes', says Chris, lying to help his friend die happily, 'We will now have more gold than we could ever imagine'. 'Yes!' says Harry, 'I knew it', and with that he dies happy, believing he has given his life for more than just a few dollars.

Chasing a bigger treasure. Seeking more glory. Wanting a reward here and now which we believe is fitting to what we are giving up or putting in.

It's hard to know if the writers of that movie got their inspiration from the account of James and John when they come to Jesus in today's Gospel reading, but their attitude of wanting to receive what they see as a fitting reward for their 'services' is certainly like that of Harry's. More likely, this is such a common human attitude that it naturally makes its way as a character trait into many book, movie, and TV show plots. This account occurs just before Jesus goes into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, so the disciples have been with Jesus for about three years now, but they still obviously don't get it. In Matthew's version it is the mother of James and John who comes to make this request on behalf of her sons: can you imagine that, 'Oh Mum, how embarrassing!' For Mark, James and John make the request themselves for one of them to sit on Jesus' right side and one on His left when He comes in glory. The 'glory' part they had heard, but not the suffering and service bit. They had given up everything, including walking away from their fishing boats at Jesus' call ('Dad still goes on about that every time we see him!'). If they know a great reward is coming for them, especially if it is above what many others get, then it will all be worth it.

What are James and John doing? Chasing a bigger treasure. Seeking more glory. Wanting a reward here and now which they believe is fitting to what they are giving up or putting in.

Jesus challenges them on this, asking if they can drink the cup he will drink and be baptised as He will – His death on the cross. 'Of course', is their reply. We know that they don't know what they are talking about because in not much more than a week they and all the other disciples will abandon Jesus as He is arrested, tried, and crucified. When the other disciples found out about the request of James and John, they were indignant; how dare they try to put themselves above us! You suspect that at least some of them were thinking, 'Oh no, I was planning to ask that same question myself. I was waiting for just the right moment. Too late now'. They too don't know what it is to follow Jesus; to drink His cup, to walk His way.

Drink the cup of suffering. Walk the way of service, to the cross. Live, and give up, our lives as Jesus did. It goes so much against our human thinking, doesn't it; effort equals reward, set your goals high and work towards them. And sometimes as Christians we allow that human thinking to come into our teaching – it's popular, people would rather hear about the glory stuff than living a life of service. I've heard Christians say that all believers will go to heaven, but those who have lived the better and more holy lives, however you define that, will be served by those who weren't so good. Or it might be taught that if

you have enough faith and pray hard enough, then God will reward you also in earthly ways with great riches and success. How does that go with the way Jesus lived His life? With what He says to the disciples here? With the call He gives us now to live our lives as His disciples?

How do we do what Jesus is calling us to do here, how do we drink His cup and walk His way? Jesus lays that out very clearly in His reply to James, John, all the disciples, and to us. Throwing aside again all human thinking, Jesus says, 'If you want to be great, you must be the servant of all the others. And if you want to be first, you must be everyone's slave. The Son of Man did not come to be a slave master, but a slave who will give his life to rescue many people.' (43b-45) That is the attitude, the thoughts, the words, the actions, we are called to as those who follow Jesus. Not making it about us, but about serving God and others, and in doing that discovering that we receive more than we want or need in this life.

How does this come out for us then? What does being a servant, putting others before us, what does that look like, sound like, feel like? Think about it regards to our relationship with God, and with others on all levels. It means we put the needs and desires of others before our own, not focusing or complaining about when things aren't how *I* want them to be but instead thinking of how they can be better for others. It means always trying to put the best construction on what others do or say, understanding that there may be factors behind their words and actions that we don't know about. It's seeing what God has given us as a means of helping others and sharing His love with them. Living life as a disciple is drinking the cup Jesus drank and walking the way of the cross Jesus walked. Think about that in relation to yourself, your relationships, your attitudes. In what way is this call of Jesus challenging you to change some of your attitudes and the way they come out?

As people we at times look at what is important in life, what is going to give us and others longer pleasure, what is going to give us a full and fulfilled life, so much differently to how God does. We need to look at this attitude of service as not about what we are giving up, but what we are gaining in Jesus; hope, peace, contentment, grace, joy. To experience these things in a way we cannot hope to do taking the normal human approach. To go back to the Magnificent Seven movie, Harry believed that hiring himself out for a large amount of gold would make his life complete and happy. We know he would have quickly spent all that money, and ending up dying alone with no one to remember him. Because he gave his life,

unknowingly, in service to that Mexican village, he was buried with honour in the village, and no doubt stories were told about his exploits and sacrifice for years to come. Rather than an unmarked grave and a life quickly forgotten, he was remembered and honoured; his service gained him much more than earthly treasure. I don't know, but I would like to think the writers of the movie put that message in there for us, as it really sums up so much of the Christian message.

Discipleship – following Jesus on the way that leads to full life, now and forever. Even after Jesus suffered, died and rose again, even after they were transformed by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the disciples didn't always take up that call to drink and walk in service as Jesus called them to do. But Jesus did it perfectly, and that's why we with the disciples receive His forgiveness as we walk on this way. In our baptism we are not only joined to His sacrifice and death, but also to the new life which is ours through Him. In receiving Holy Communion, in drinking the cup we are joined to His life and death, and to the forgiveness He offers as we have those daily struggles in living our lives as He calls us to. It's not just a path of service, but a path of receiving so much that we can't imagine, both now and forever. Drink and walk in service, seeking to serve God and others in all things, knowing that this is the way to richness and fullness of life both now and forever. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Can you think of any other movies, books, or TV shows in which someone discovers that they receive so much in more in life by doing what they can to serve others rather than focusing on themselves?
- What do you believe we receive in our lives, now and for eternity, as we live the life Jesus calls us to live? Do you experience these things, even some of the time? How would your life be different if you didn't have the fullness of life Jesus offers to all who come to Him?
- Think about what it means to be called to drink and walk in service. In considering Jesus' teaching to humbly always put God and others before ourselves are there any parts of your life, any attitudes, which you find particularly difficult or you know need to be changed? Be honest with yourself. Give these over to God, asking for both His forgiveness and also the strength to walk each day as one of His disciples.

Pray: thank God for His love for us in Jesus, and that because of the cup Jesus drank and the way of service He walked we have new life, hope, joy, peace, and God's grace now and forever. Ask God to forgive us when we fail in walking this way, and for the strength to set out along this way each day.

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