

First Trinity Lutheran Church
20th Sunday in Pentecost
October 22, 2006
Mark 10:35-45

I Called Shotgun First

Years ago when I was a child my sister and I would argue for the right to sit on the front seat of my father's 1954 Pontiac. Remember the phrase "I call shotgun." Well that is what we would yell to each other when we were running out of the house or just leaving the store and heading to the car. Each of us wanted to sit in the front seat. Of course that was back in the days of no seat belts, metal dashboards, and no airbags. But we would call "shotgun"! And we would argue amongst ourselves about who called it first. I called it! No, I did! I called it yesterday! Well, I called it when we got home last week! This argument could go on for quite sometime.

In our own way all of us want the seats of honor. We don't like taking the backseat to anyone. Picture this scene, you and your luggage are in a line that winds toward the ticket agent at the airport. And then a VIP, or a rich person or someone who knows someone else, gets to go to the front of the line, bypassing all the other poor souls who've been waiting their turn. Some places of business have this little machine that has little tabs with numbers on them that you pull and when they call your number you get waited on. I've been in the store with number 43. The sign on the wall says serving #38. Mind you I'm the only customer in the store but I can't get service until they run through #'s 39, 40, 41, & 42. It's frustrating.

Today we continue on Jesus' journey. We have followed this journey of Jesus from Capernaum where the disciples were arguing who was the greatest, through Judea and the encounter with the rich man, and now we're on our way to Jerusalem. It's at this point that James and John come up with what they consider to be a pretty good idea. They've been brainstorming cause there's a lot of time to think when you're walking miles from here to there. James says, "Hey John, you know, there will be twelve seats in heaven for the twelve of us, so let's ask for the best seats in the house." Of course John agrees, thinking if we don't ask I'm sure Peter will,

or one of the others. So they call “Shotgun”!

This attitude of being first, or having honor or the prestige of a title still haunts us today. Who is the greatest? They go right up to Jesus and say, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” Did you hear those two key words? WE WANT. WE. WANT. WE WANT you to do for us whatever we ask. And therein lies the problem. They look at Jesus and his power and come up to him whispering some self-serving request. And are we not just like the disciples sneaking around, asking special privileges from God, seeking our own agenda, wanting God to help our team win.

Now, we need to understand this passage in its context. The disciples have been stuck on this issue since way back in Mark 9:33. They’re getting close to Jerusalem now. Jesus is coming closer to his death, a fact that he reminds them of repeatedly. He’s been verbally attacked by the Pharisees, talked about greatness with a child on his lap, and watched the rich ruler turn away. And still the disciples are whining about who is the greatest. Does that surprise us? It shouldn’t. We, too still play these games of power and prestige. It’s all about me, me, me.

“Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” What a way to ask for something!

Jesus responds, “What is it you want me to do for you?” What do you want? Man, that is a loaded question. Ask any child and you’ll get 5, 10, 15 answers like that. That’s like asking, “If you could have anything in the world, what would it be?” A loaded question!

But Jesus asks it. “Well, Me and James here were thinkin’ we’d like to sit at your left and right in your glory.” I love Jesus’ answer. “You don’t know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” “We can,” they answered. Boy are they naïve.

When I think of someone being on Jesus’ left and right, I think of the thieves on the crosses to the left and right at Jesus’ crucifixion. So when Jesus asks them about the cup and baptism, he’s asking them if they can go through what he is going to go through. They think they

can and Jesus says, “Man, you guys don’t know what you’re getting yourselves into.”

All they’re thinking about is the prestige and honor, not the sacrifice, trials, and hardship that comes with it. I can relate to that.

We all know how quickly jealousy breaks out when a small group seems to have acquired a privilege that others couldn’t share or didn’t know about. We read in verse 41, “When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.” Scripture doesn’t say why they became indignant. It could be because the audacity of the request. “I can’t believe they asked for the best seats.” I lean toward maybe they were upset because James and John had called “shotgun” first. So, in response to all of this, Jesus calls all the disciples together and explains how life among them is to be lived. “Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant.” And he further qualifies his teaching by the example of his own person and work. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

During the American Revolutionary War a company of soldiers under the command of a captain was building a fort out of a pile of heavy logs. While wrestling with a log which was to form the capstone and was really too heavy for the men to handle, the captain kept yelling at his men "heave it up", while he himself stood by with his hands on his hips. Suddenly a stranger in everyday clothing rode up on horseback, and seeing the soldiers sweating and struggling with the log, he stopped and asked the captain why he was not helping his men. "I AM AN OFFICER" was the reply. With that the stranger jumped off his horse, took off his coat, and helped the men put the heavy log in place. Then, as he was about to ride away, he said to the captain "Next time you need help, just call on me. My name is George Washington and I am Commander In Chief of The United States Army!"

That’s the type of person Jesus is looking for. The true test of discipleship is found in the challenge to follow Jesus in his selfless suffering on behalf of others. Greatness, from God’s

point of view, is found in godlike graciousness, generosity, and service, not in achieving positions of privilege and power that win the accolades of human culture.

The disciples, and unfortunately we, too, have an entirely different agenda. Jesus speaks of His Cross and we think of ourselves. Somehow, the message never seems to sink in. We've called "shotgun". We're riding in the front seat, enjoying the view. But just like the disciples, we're blind. The greatest sacrifice was described to them and is described to us and we've all missed the point. The point Jesus is trying to make is that God calls us to give our lives in order to help others. This is what ministry is all about. We are not here to be served; we are here to serve. I hope that, if you're still calling "shotgun", that someday soon you will hit the metal dashboard and learn that it isn't our agenda that we need to follow, but God's.