

The First Reading is Psalm 104:1-9, 24, 25c

¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul.

O LORD my God, you are very great.

You are clothed with honor and majesty,

² wrapped in light as with a garment.

You stretch out the heavens like a tent,

³ you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,

you make the clouds your chariot,

you ride on the wings of the wind,

⁴ you make the winds your messengers,

fire and flame your ministers.

⁵ You set the earth on its foundations,

so that it shall never be shaken.

⁶ You cover it with the deep as with a garment;

the waters stood above the mountains.

⁷ At your rebuke they flee;

at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.

⁸ They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys

to the place that you appointed for them.

⁹ You set a boundary that they may not pass,

so that they might not again cover the earth.

²⁴ O LORD, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom you have made them all;

the earth is full of your creatures,

^{25c} living things both small and great.

The Second Reading is Mark 10:35-45

³⁵ James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." ³⁶ And Jesus said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" ³⁷ And they said to Jesus, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." ³⁸ But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" ³⁹ They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

⁴¹ When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. ⁴² So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ⁴³ But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ ***For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve***, and to give his life a ransom for many."

The Message – What Do You Want?

I imagine more than a few people have asked Jesus, “Just this once let it be me!” At least anyone who plays the lottery has probably asked Jesus something like this a time or two. Maybe so they can quit a job they can’t stand. Maybe so they can stop struggling to provide for their family. Maybe just to become rich. In case you didn’t read the headlines this weekend, the Mega Millions multi-state jackpot will climb to \$1.6 billion with a “B” by Tuesday making it the largest US lottery jackpot ever. And if a sole winner takes the jackpot and opts for a cash payout the winner will clear nearly \$905 million!

Well, Jesus did say to James and John, “What is it you want me to do for you?” Maybe Jesus is asking us this same question today! Oh Jesus, just this once let it be me! This may sound outrageous to ask Jesus to win the lottery, but listen again to what James and John asked, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left in your glory.” James and John were seeking glory for all eternity! Let us have seats of honor next to you Jesus forever!

I love Jesus’ response to their outrageous ask, “You do not know what you are asking!” I am sure you have heard this statement before, “Be careful what you ask for!” Be careful what you pray for, as you might actually get it!

Like lottery winners who get more than they bargained for... Lara and Roger Griffiths bought their dream home with their \$2.76 million lottery jackpot and then their life together fell apart, ending in divorce; Bud Post who lost \$16.2 million within a nightmarish year, with his own brother putting out a hit on him hoping to inherit some of the money; Eveyln Adams who couldn’t handle the publicity and ended up gambling her \$5.4 million dollar winnings away in Atlantic City.

An article by Shawn Carter this past Friday advised, “If you find yourself holding a winning ticket, though, it doesn't mean all your financial worries will go away. Lottery winners are actually more likely to declare bankruptcy than the average American. Why? Because, “money can change, disrupt or end relationships,” writes Carter. Be careful what you ask or pray for when it comes to winning the lottery!

Maybe James and John should have been cautioned, too, as their ask was actually more outrageous than asking for a winning lotto ticket! James and John’s ask was also rather bold or maybe even arrogant, for they first said to Jesus, “We want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” Really? They thought they could tell Jesus do this or that and he would just comply! Yet, Jesus doesn’t scold them for their audacity. Instead, he just sincerely responds saying, “What is it you want me to do for you?”

Well, I have spent the better part of the past week allowing Jesus to ask me this question, “Cheryl, what is it you want me to do for you?” My mind was flooded with asks that ranged from a sanctuary full of passionate people for Christ not only on Sundays, but maybe Wednesdays, too, to our vacant lot beautifully developed to bless us and our community; from a clean bill of health this coming week from my oncologist to a long lifetime of love with Paul and my sons and their future families; from the symphony holding concerts in our redesigned sanctuary to our facilities being occupied seven days a week with ministries that impact our community; from a civic and national atmosphere of respect and humility with and for all peoples to a supportive housing project here in Redlands to house the homeless; from the wisdom to lead us into our future as God’s church to a vibrant music and arts community center

in the space below us. I filled up pages of my journal answering Jesus' question, "What do you want me to do for you, Cheryl?" Yet, with each answer I wrote, I was driven deeper into what is it that I really want Jesus to do for me.

What is the one thing that I really want Jesus to do for me? What is the one thing that you want Jesus to do for you?

James and John wanted one thing - a place of honor for all eternity. What is it that you want? What is it that we want as a church? When asking, remember the caution of Jesus' response, "You do not know what you are asking!"

Let me just explore a couple of my journaled asks. A sanctuary filled with passionate people for Christ not only on Sundays, but maybe on Wednesdays, too! If Jesus miraculously answered this ask and new people were drawn to God through this church we would go from about 200 people to over 400 people or maybe even 800 if the sanctuary was full in the morning and the evening! This would dramatically change the dynamics of who we are as a church and what would be required of me as your lead pastor, not to mention the practicality of finding parking! Or what if Jesus miraculously changed the tenor of our civic and national dialogues from discord and divisiveness to dialogues seasoned with respect and humility? We would all be required to engage all others with respect and humility regardless of their beliefs. Is all your communication seasoned with respect and humility?

No matter what I asked Jesus for, I couldn't shake off Jesus' caution, "You do not know what you ask for." James and John were quick to respond to Jesus saying, "Sure, we can drink the cup that you drink and be baptized with the baptism that you are baptized Jesus." Yet, even in answering Jesus' question they had no idea what saying yes really meant for them. They were thinking about a place of glory for all eternity, while Jesus was talking about being a servant, a slave, about laying down his life for others.

To be honest, I am not sure we ever fully understand the ramifications of what we ask of Jesus. I only know that Jesus had one thing in mind for all of us who chose to follow his ways.

"You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them." Often the same holds true in our world. Those is power work to keep themselves in power. Those is power use their power to keep their privilege and places of honor. Some, as scripture points out become tyrants, abusive to those who are subject to their power. Tyrants who belittle, demean and dehumanize those they have power over.

Yet, Jesus makes it clear that this is not to be so among them. He uses the conjunction "**but**" to interrupt "what is" with "what will be." "**But** it is not so among you; **but** whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all."

To follow Jesus is not about gaining prestigious power or securing a place of honor as James and John hoped. To follow Jesus is not about being served whatever it is you think you need or deserve or want. To follow Jesus is to serve, to give away your life for those held hostage. The one thing Jesus had in mind for all of us who choose to follow him is this – we are to serve others and give ourselves away for the sake of others. We are to realize that our one precious life isn't so much about us, as it is about those whose lives are touched by our one life.

This past Tuesday night (a memorial service) was a testament to this truth, as Gary Platz didn't seek power or prestige, he humbly sought to serve and to give himself away for the sake

of others. Tuesday night was a testament to the way we are all to live, to use every good, bad and ugly experience in our lives, that has been redeemed by Christ to minister to others.

Gary's story reminds me of a woman in my last congregation, whose son sustained a head injury over 30 years ago. It is was a long and trying road. Yet, God redeemed Sharon's pain and she as felt compelled by the Spirit to help others in similar situations over the years. While serving as her pastor, she called to ask for prayers, because she was heading to the hospital once again to share herself with a family whose son had just had an accident that resulted in a brain injury. She didn't know if they would welcome her presence or not, but she had read his story in the local newspaper. So, she went to the hospital with my prayer support. It wasn't long before I heard the outcome. The family welcomed her presence and she walked with them through their son's long recovery. Gary and Sharon both generously gave of themselves for others.

Do you remember Rev. Roceni Bakian's words last week, when she made this observation about the names of American churches – Why all these “firsts” - First Lutheran, First Baptist, First Methodist, First Congregational, First Presbyterian? It seems that those who named our churches may have had a little more James and John in them then they would care to admit today. I imagine we all probably have a bit of James and John in us. Who doesn't like being first or receiving honors? Yet Jesus says to us, “But, it is not so among you.”

Friends, whatever we dare to ask of Jesus ought to result, not in being served or being glorified, but in self-giving and serving. Jesus “came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many,” and we are called to walk in his footsteps. Amen.