

What are You Asking

Shepherd's Grace Church

October 21, 20112

Mark 10:35-45

³⁵James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."³⁶And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" ³⁷And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." ³⁸But 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?" ³⁹They 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."

⁴¹When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. ⁴²So 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. ⁴³But 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. ⁴⁵For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Also Read Job 38: 1-7, 34-41)

Context: This is pet Sunday. As we sit in the sanctuary, many have brought their animals to be blessed. Pets become a part of our family. They love unconditionally and they trust without fail! We can learn much from our pets. The message for today ties in closely to one of their most profound teachings.

For the past several weeks now, we have been reading the Book of Job as our Hebrew Bible lesson. We started by discovering that Job is a righteous man. This revelation is made not from the lips of mortals, but by the very mouth of God. It therefore comes as great surprise to us that God allows Job to be tempted by Satan. We do not want to allow for the possibility that God will not always keep us from evil, however it is a reality. In the Lord's prayer, we pray for deliverance from evil. I believe we pray this way (as Jesus teaches) because we know there will be times in our lives when evil is present. God has never shielded his faithful from evil, but rather he has often put us right in the middle of it. He does this not for our own growth, though that is a stirring side effect, but for the growth of others. God wants those who do not yet know him by faith to understand the benefits of that faith!

Job exhibits that faith in chapter 2 when his wife encourages him, after calamity has robbed him of his family and his fortune, to curse God and die. Job responds as a person of faith. He says, "Should we

only praise God in the good times and not the bad?" He wants her and us to know that in all things God is still God. In this we proclaim that "All the time, God is good and God is good, all the time!" After a time of continuous testing, however, even Job becomes frustrated. In Chapter 23, he rails against God! Job demands that God give him an audience so he can express his complaints...You have to be careful what you ask for when you ask for God! Today, in chapter 38, God shows up!

God thunders at Job, reminding him that he doesn't know what he is talking about when he challenges God! Job doesn't know how creation has taken place. Job doesn't know how the waters are divided from the dry lands! Job doesn't even speak God's language...he has no comprehension, no understanding, no perspective from which to complain about how God creates or rules creation. All Job can know for sure is that God is God! It seems that we as 21st century Christians often want to take up Job's fight with God. We want to accuse God of not understanding, or being slow to respond, or being so far removed as to not be aware of our needs. Sometimes we forget that God is God and God is sovereign. We as humans do not like to believe that another, even God can know better, or more about our needs than we do! The issue here is trust. We have a difficult time trusting, allowing God to be God and to deal with our issues. This is exactly where the Gospel lesson today intersects with our lesson from Job and with the lessons we can learn from our four legged friends.

During the course of a week, I receive a lot of e-mail from many of you. I want you to know that I read them all. Some I forward, some I save as sermon illustrations, the political ones I read, laugh at, and usually delete. Earlier this week, I received an e-mail from Donnie Huffman. It ties in well with our lesson from Mark today, though not in the way you might think. Seems there was a senior citizen shopping at the local Food Lion buying a large bag of Purina dog chow for his loyal pet, Jake, the Wonder Dog and was in the check-out line when a woman behind him asked if he had a dog.

What did she think I had an elephant?

So because I'm retired and have little to do, on impulse I told her that no, I didn't have a dog, I was starting the Purina Diet again. I added that I probably shouldn't, because I ended up in the hospital last time, but that I'd lost 50 pounds before I awakened in an intensive care ward with tubes coming out of most of my orifices and IVs in both arms.

I told her that it was essentially a Perfect Diet and that the way that it works is, to load your pants pockets with Purina Nuggets and simply eat one or two every time you feel hungry. The food is nutritionally complete so it works well and I was going to try it again. (I have to mention here that practically everyone in line was now enthralled with my story.)

Horrified, she asked if I ended up in intensive care, because the dog food poisoned me. I told her no, I

stepped off the curb to sniff a Fire Hydrant and a car hit me. I thought the guy behind her was going to have a heart attack he was Laughing so hard...HMM!!

You see, the woman in line expected the senior in line to answer her in a straightforward and honest way. The woman trusted the man and as a result she had a prank played on her. Jokes such as this one are harmless and humorous. There is no harm done, but for us today, there is a larger issue to be understood. The issue is trust. When James and John approached Jesus, they said, "Teacher, we want you to give us whatever we ask." They trusted Jesus. They weren't interested in practical jokes and they believed in his ability to grant their request.

About 6 years ago, the first winter Rochelle and I were married, Kenton and some of his friends were playing in the snow outside. Suddenly, Kenton burst into the kitchen through the back door and boldly demanded of his mother, "Do we have any dog biscuits?" He trusted his mom to give him whatever he asked for! Rochelle, just like Jesus asked, "What do you want with dog biscuits?" When Kenton explained that there was a big yellow dog in the front yard and he wanted to feed him Rochelle immediately told him no! Then she went out and saw the dog, saw his condition and fed him herself! We discovered that the dog had been dumped, had no home, and was very undernourished. He came into our home and has been a part of our lives ever since. Just as James and John trusted Jesus for his answer, Kenton also trusted Rochelle for hers.

Being a parent means investigating the questions our children ask. We would like to give them whatever they ask, but we are better parents if we give them whatever they need. Our responsibility as parents is not to supply our children's every want, but to teach them to trust us to do what is best for them in every situation. Sometimes that will mean they get what they want, sometimes it means they will get what they need. Jesus demonstrates this as he asks the question, "Will you drink from the cup from which I drink, and will you be baptized with the same baptism I am?" His point was, *What are you asking?* It is the same point God makes to Job. James and John did not understand that the cup and the baptism were symbols of suffering and persecution. They did not speak Jesus language. Job did not understand that God was God. He did not speak God's language. Kenton did not understand why his mother said no. He didn't speak the language of a parent.

In all these situations, the issue is trust! As good parents, we teach our children that we are trustworthy and that they can depend upon us to do what is best for them. God does the same with us. If we will put ourselves in His care, we can always depend upon him. James and John understood this. They asked without hesitation. They asked boldly. When they were told what the cost of their request would be, without hesitation they were willing to pay. This was true because they knew they could depend upon Jesus. When he told them no, notice their reaction. There was none. Their request was not one Jesus could grant. The passage does not tell us that they cried or complained. They accepted his answer. They trusted his response.

It is interesting here to pause just for a moment and consider to whom the honor of being on Jesus' right and left would go. The ones who would die with him and enter into his glory were two thieves. One had to be convinced of the power of God, the other believed and asked. God does not put limitations on when we come to believe and trust. He would like us to respond sooner rather than later, but the response is all that is necessary. Romans 10 says that if we believe in our hearts and confess with our lips that Christ was crucified and died for our redemption, we will be saved. Our opportunity is to accept the gift of God's great grace and love and to trust Him!

The other 10 disciples had a problem with this point. They were angry with James and John. Apparently they thought there was only so much glory to go around. They needed to be taught what we need to be taught so frequently. There are no limits to God's great love! We learn that lesson today from our four legged friends who are here with us.

Not long after the big yellow dog (Eugh—the name is another story) came to live with us, he started running with me. Back then, I was running 4-5 miles a day and he could run the whole distance. Every time I even looked like I was going to put on running gear, he was right there wagging his tail and heading for the door. He loved to run with me. As I got into better shape and could run farther, he ran with me. One day we were running a 13 mile run and the humidity was very high. I tried to keep both of us hydrated well but did not realize Eugh was not getting enough water. At about 10 miles, I noticed he was lagging behind. He kept trying to run, trying to keep up until he collapsed. Eugh would have run himself to death because of his love for running with, being with me. His love was unconditional! It never occurred to him to quit. He only wanted to be where I was, to share time and this activity that we both enjoyed so much.

Eugh has that same love for Kenton, for Broderick, and for Rochelle. Whenever they are doing something, mowing or cooking or just sitting and reading, he is right there. He never insists that we do more or that we do something else. He just wants to be there with us. There is plenty of him to go around. That's how it is with God's love! He is never selfish in his love. He is never jealous in His love! He wants us to be there, to spend time with him, no matter what we are doing.

That is the point Jesus is trying to make when he talks with the disciples as a group. He compares them to the gentiles. The gentiles like to control others, to lord power over them! Jesus says, "it is not so with you." Notice how he uses the present tense here. Beginning, right now, it is not so! From this moment on, Jesus says, you will regard each other as of great value. The one of you who would put all others first, the one who would serve all people and all of creation...that one will be first because that one has been willing to be last.

Many who know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior can name the day, the hour, even the minute they received Him as Savior. I love that they can know that. I think it is wonderful that their memory has so

captured that moment that they will never forget. I do not have that memory. I only know that I believe! God help me in my unbelief. However, whether I know the day and the hour or just that it is, I believe Jesus will be disappointed if, when I meet him in heaven I can only tell him I believe. I think He will look at me and remind me of all the people I have had a chance to witness to and ask why I wasn't more diligent in sharing the good news with them. I believe Jesus wants each of us to recognize that in God's grace there is more than enough glory to go around and that we should be willing to share God's love without hesitation. James and John said, "Yes, Lord! We are able!" Eugh said, "Yes, Master! I am able." To the death we will follow you!

Are we able? Are we willing to trust God so completely that we will ask him anything and be satisfied with his answer? Are we willing to trust God so completely that we are willing to be last to enter the Kingdom so that others might be first? Are we willing to love as unconditionally as our four legged friends do? Are we able?

Perhaps a final lesson might come from the last verse of today's lesson from Mark. Jesus says, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve—and to give his life as a ransom for many." So often we get caught up in the second half of this verse. We fall on our knees and give thanks because Jesus is willing to give His life for us. We should do this, and we worship Him because of this, however, in God's eyes, I believe our redemption was complete when Jesus said, "I will go and redeem them." When Jesus agreed to give up his divinity to take on humanity, he made the sacrifice sufficient to save us. It was not the action of death, but the conviction of life on His part that makes the abundance of life possible on ours.

When we wonder if God is involved in our lives, if God is present with us, if God is able to create a new situation out of seemingly impossible circumstances, we need only remember that "God sent His son! They called him Jesus! He came to love, heal and forgive. He lived and died to by our pardon and life is worth the living just because He lives!" He came to walk as one of us, to live as one of us, to love as one of us. His willingness to run all the way even to death for us allows us to run all the way, even to life with Him! We do not always know what we are asking, but we can always trust what he is answering!

Amen.

Next Week: Scripture: Mark 10: 46-51. Message: A Shhh!...Be Quiet. This week we encounter the crowd trying to silence someone who would not be silenced. Have you ever known someone so persistent that they become annoying? How do you respond to those kinds of people? What do you want them to hear from you? What does Jesus want to hear? As he makes his way to Jerusalem, to crucifixion how does he respond to annoying people? Come and Worship! Come and See!

