

First Trinity Lutheran
October 21, 2012
Mark 10: 35-45

What Do You Want in Life?

What do you want in life? Peace on earth, Good health, a job, or maybe a better job. Are you worried about the future? Well I have the answer to all those questions. JESUS CHRIST IS THE ANSWER. In many ways this is the way Christianity is presented. You have some need, perhaps a need for peace in a troubled life, the need for greater hope and confidence in the future. Well, Jesus is the answer. Some call this "evangelism," the attempt to lure people toward the gospel, the effort to win people to Christ, by putting forth all the benefits of following Jesus. Looking for meaning in life? Jesus has got it for you. A sense of serenity and hope in an often difficult and demanding world? Jesus has got you covered.

A few weeks ago the Pew Forum on Religions and public life found that for the first time Protestants make up less than 50% of the population of the United States. The most troubling statistic for Christians in the study is that the group non-believers are growing larger as well as those people who consider themselves, don't associated with any religious group. Nones some have called these people.

I have always tried to greet visitors and guest who are looking for a church home with the mindset that the church is here to meet your needs. Tell me what your needs are and we will find a way to meet them. Even those who have stopped coming to church on a regular basis I have tried to reach out to them and ask what can we do to me you needs. "The church is here to meet people's felt needs," that is what I believed.

Our Gospel reading for today is from Mark's gospel. Mark certainly wants to reach people with the message of Christ. Mark's gospel begins with "Here is the good news of Jesus Christ." Here in Mark is the good news about Jesus. But remarkably, when compared with the

way we talk about Jesus, Mark has little to say about our felt needs, our struggles and our difficulties. Yes Mark mainly talks just about Jesus, but when he talks about Jesus, it's not Jesus as the answer to our problems that Mark stresses but, rather, Jesus as demanding Lord.

Take today's scripture. As the disciples walk along with Jesus, a couple of the disciples say, "Lord, grant us to sit at your right and your left when you come into your kingdom." Those who sit next to the chief are those who share power with the chief. In other words, "Lord, when we get you elected Messiah and your Kingdom is come, grant us to sit on your Cabinet!"

It is an understandable request for the disciples to make of Jesus. After all, here are the ones who have left everything and they've come to follow Jesus, to walk with Jesus along his way. Why did they commit to Jesus? Well, unlike a lot of people, they believe that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, the great leader who would come in, raise an army, kick out the Romans out of Judea, set up Israel again as the most powerful nation in the world.

It had not been easy trooping around behind Jesus through Judea. Their request is quite understandable: "Lord, when you finally get everything together and win your kingdom, let us sit beside you in ruling your realm." Lord, when you at last bring peace on earth, let that peace first be in my heart, in my marriage, in my family. Lord, when you at last lift up the poor and set things right in the world, be sure that I am one of the major beneficiaries.

And Jesus replies to this perfectly understandable request by saying: "You don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" We know what the disciples don't know. The road that Jesus is walking is a road that leads to torture, to death on a cross. The "cup" that Jesus is to drink is the cup of his horrible death. The "baptism" that will drown him is the baptism of his death as he suffocates to death on a cross. The disciples show that they are clueless when they

respond, "Sure! We can do that! We are able to drink your cup and be baptized with your baptism! No problem!"

And we would expect Jesus to say "You your crazy disciples you are clueless? You show by your response that you don't have the foggiest idea of what I've been talking about all along the road, do you?" And maybe Jesus was thinking that. But what Jesus actually said was, "You *will* drink the cup that I drink, you *will* be baptized with my baptism." Jesus promises his disciples not that they shall be in glory with him, rewarded and happy. He promises that if they will follow him they shall share with him in his sufferings and challenges.

This is the message that contemporary followers of Jesus have been reluctant to proclaim to the world, perhaps because we're reluctant to hear this message ourselves! Jesus is not a technique for getting what we want out of God; Jesus is God's way of getting what God wants out of us. God wants a world, a world redeemed, restored to God. And the way God gets that is with ordinary people like us who are willing to walk like Jesus, talk like Jesus, yes, and even if need be to suffer like Jesus.

I've always thought it would have been enough of a challenge if Jesus had only said, "Even though I am the Messiah, the Son of God, Savior of the world, I am going to be nailed to a cross." In this situation Jesus said, "There's a cross for you too. Come, take up your cross and follow." There have been many an outdoor church sign that read something like this, "Celebrate Life!" Come, celebrate Eternal Life, and Live in the Joy of Everlasting Life. But you never see a church sign that says, "Come! Be Crucified! We've Got a Cross that Fits You Too!" And yet, Jesus was upfront. Can't accuse Jesus of false advertising. "You will drink the cup that I drink; you will be baptized with my baptism."

When William Willimon was Campus Minister at Duke University a fellow campus minister asked him to participate in a baptism of a graduate student. The grad student was from China. He had been attracted to the Christian faith while a student at Duke. Pastor Willimon joyfully participated in the baptism of the student and thought it a bright idea to bring his camera and take a few pictures after the baptism. "You can send these pictures to your family back in China, and you can share your baptism day with your friends at home," Willimon said as he maneuvered everyone into place for the snapshots. Willimon noticed that the group looked a little shy and awkward, but they all stood together as he took the pictures.

After the baptism the other campus minister said to Willimon, "Oh, that was embarrassing, you with your camera and all." "Embarrassing? Why?" he asked. "Well, because now that he's baptized, his life has been ruined. His parents say that they will disinherit him. The government will probably take away his scholarship. He can't show those pictures to anybody back home. His life as he knew it is over; he's been baptized into Jesus." Oops! But this story certainly reminds us of the text for today "You *will* be baptized with my baptism...."

I heard of a young man who grew up in a Christian family but he did not feel that following Jesus was really for him. He was going through a turbulent period in his life and happened to attend a youth worship service where he unexpectedly gave his life to Christ. He said of his conversion, "I have found what I've always been looking for." He now runs a ministry for inner city kids in East Saint Louis. He lives in a dangerous, tough part of town, sharing the lot of the kids who come to his ministry. He has been the victim of crime on a number of occasions; one can only marvel at his faith and his faithfulness. He said "Well, it's sort of what you sometimes get when you get Jesus. I thought I 'found Christ' when in reality, Christ found me. I

thought he wanted to give me something. Well he has given me many good gifts, but mostly what Jesus gave me was a job to do for him rather than to do what I wanted to do for myself." When I heard this story I thought of today's scripture: "You *will* drink out of the same cup that I drink."

So being a follower of Jesus is not about living the good life and that all that might entail, but maybe part of the reason why Jesus gives his life for us is to show us how to receive by giving, how to lead by serving, and how to find our lives by losing them for the sake of the people around us that God loves so much. **Amen**