

Let Me See  
Mark 10:32-45  
Mark 10:46-52

Westminster Presbyterian Church  
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Mark 10:32-52

They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.'

James 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.' And he said to them, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.' 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?' 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; 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.'

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 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. 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. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

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They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

A week and a half ago, on Ash Wednesday, we heard about Jesus telling his disciples what was going to happen. Good Friday may have surprised Jesus' disciples, but it was not because he didn't warn them what was coming.

In our Gospel reading today, he tells them again that they are headed up to Jerusalem, and what's going to happen there. I can't imagine that this was a cheerful conversation. This was not something that Jesus wanted to happen. But it was what was going to happen.

So James and John decide to prove that Simon Peter doesn't have a monopoly either on not listening, or on putting his foot in his mouth.<sup>1</sup> They try to get Jesus to sign a verbal blank check, to promise to do for them whatever they ask.

Jesus knows his disciples. Jesus knows better. He asks them, "What is it you want me to do for you?"

They ask for the foremost places of honor, right next to Jesus on his left and right, when he is king in all his glory.

Jesus shakes his head. They don't know what they're asking for. Their lives will be ...difficult after Jesus' death and resurrection. Not as bad as Jesus' trial and crucifixion, but bad enough.<sup>2</sup> Places of honor in Heaven,

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<sup>1</sup> When this story is told in Matthew's gospel, Matthew describes their mother asking on her sons' behalf, rather than James and John, thus absolving them of responsibility. In Mark, James and John ask for themselves.

<sup>2</sup> According to Christian lore, James will be beheaded, as one of the first Christian martyrs. John will be the only one of the Twelve to die a natural death, but he will get to live with all his friends dying.

though, are not party favors. They are for the people whom God has decided they're for.

And, more to the point, places of honor in Heaven are beside the point of what's going on here and now. Jesus has just told them a couple times now that he is going to Jerusalem not to conquer the world, but to die. He's told them that he's going to be crucified, the most severe punishment the Romans have available and at least in the Top Ten of worst possible ways to die.

And, rather than saying, "We'll never let that happen to you, Teacher!", which would be wrong but at least well-intentioned, ...

Rather than asking how they ought to deal with that situation, ...

James and John are not listening to what Jesus is saying, because they are too concerned with exactly how exalted their social status is eventually going to be. You know, when Jesus is the greatest of earthly kings and kicks the Romans out and is sitting on his throne in glory. Exactly what Jesus is telling them is never going to happen.

Then the other ten of Jesus' core group hear about this, and they prove that they're not listening either. They get angry with James and John, not for not listening, but for trying to be sneaky and get an inside track on status.

Jesus calls the disciples together and lays down the law. They are missing the point. Jesus came to earth not to be served but to serve human

beings, and to give his life for others. That means that people who are trying to follow him shouldn't be lording things over each other, either.

Then they come to Jericho, and a blind beggar named Bartimaeus<sup>3</sup> shouts out, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus calls the man over, and asks him the same question he asked James and John. 'What do you want me to do for you?'

The man responds immediately, 'My teacher, let me see again.' He is not concerned with status or who's important and who's not. He wants to see.

Jesus heals Bartimaeus, and he starts following Jesus.

Jesus has been saying since the very start of his ministry that, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."<sup>4</sup> He has been preaching this all along: there are no mixed messages here.

The problem is that what he's saying is directly counter to the world around him. God's kingdom is not like the empires that the people know about. That makes it difficult for them to understand.

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<sup>3</sup> One reason for naming this man is that he presumably survived the crucifixion, and is a named eyewitness to this miracle by Jesus. The Gospels are not "long, long ago, in a Galilee far, far away." They are rooted in specific real places and specific real people.

<sup>4</sup> Mark 1:15.

Some of you have heard me say this before, but I'm going to say it again. Christianity is not the dominant religion in the world today. As the late Walter Wink put it, "The dominant religion on the planet is not Christianity, Islam, Hinduism or Judaism but the pervasive faith in violence."<sup>5</sup> The most common religious conviction on the planet is the unshakable belief that violence can solve all the world's problems, even the ones caused by violence.

That was certainly true in Jesus' day, just as it is today.

I could do ten minutes on the false myth of redemptive violence,<sup>6</sup> but I'll spare you that. If you doubt that the majority of people in the world believe in that myth and the related myths about violence saving people, then turn on the television. Watch a couple hours even of kids' TV shows. You don't have to go to the movies: just scan the ads online or in the newspaper. You can do the same thing anywhere in the world, and you'll see the same thing.

The kingdoms of the world are based on violence. This may not be a popular thought, but it's true. If they existed today, the great kings and emperors of history would be described as hereditary warlords. Historically

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<sup>5</sup> Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*.

<sup>6</sup> What it is: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myth\\_of\\_redemptive\\_violence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myth_of_redemptive_violence). An article on a Christian response: [http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/content/cpt/article\\_060823wink.shtml](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/content/cpt/article_060823wink.shtml).

speaking, the difference between a warlord and a king or queen is time and tradition, not some standard of worthiness.<sup>7</sup>

The Kingdom of God is not based on violence. It is based on God's loving the world too much to let our sins be the final word. God loves us so much that God sent God's only begotten son out of Heaven down here to Earth. While Jesus was here on Earth, he lived our life. He ate. He drank. I'm sure that he laughed. He loved the people around him enough to cry when Lazarus died.<sup>8</sup> And, when the time came, Jesus died for us. Not because we deserve reprieve, but because we do not. Like Bartimaeus, we do not have a right to Jesus' love and Jesus' dying for us. But Jesus does love us. And Jesus did die for us.

In the Kingdom of God, that's what the king is like. And the king has told us how to live.

"Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all." In God's kingdom, love and service are the currency of the land. Loving even your enemies. Hate gets you nowhere. Violence gets you nowhere. Earthly status gets you nowhere – it's kind of beside the point.

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<sup>7</sup> The Saud family in Saudi Arabia are a modern example: before the end of WWI in 1918 they were warlords; now they're kings. The difference between that and, say, the present-day British monarchy, is time, not behavior or some other standard of worthiness.

<sup>8</sup> John 11:35.

Jesus has been telling his disciples this. Jesus has been saying this to anyone who would listen, ever since he started his ministry. The disciples seem sometimes to be determined not to get it.

I can just imagine Jesus saying to himself, "They're messing with me, right? They're going to stop and show me that they get it." But they never do, because they really don't get it. I think Jesus had to have been tempted sometimes to just give this whole thing up as a bad job, to go back to Heaven and tell the Father, "I tried, but these people cannot see what's right in front of their faces. Just wipe them all out and start over." But he doesn't. That's how much he loves us.

This mythos of violence is so powerful that it isn't until Jesus is resurrected that I believe the disciples really "Get It get it."<sup>9</sup> Not just say the right words sometimes, but really get it. Jesus dying for them and for us is the miracle that opens their eyes, that they may see.<sup>10</sup>

We have an advantage over the disciples. We already know that Jesus died, offering no resistance to people he could have blown away at will, for us. We already know that God resurrected Jesus in love, and he came back

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<sup>9</sup> Peter with his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane is a tragic illustration of this (John 18:10).

<sup>10</sup> Allusion to Clara H Scott's *Open My Eyes, That I May See (Glory to God #451)* entirely intentional.

to give his disciples final instructions. We can get past the mythos of violence to love.

Love for everybody. Even the people we may not like very much. Even people who define themselves as our enemies. That love is what allows us to see the world the way that Jesus sees it, see people the way that Jesus sees them.

My sisters and brothers, I invite you to join with me and with Bartimaeus and with Christians over the last two thousand years in saying, "Jesus, have mercy on me! I want to see."

Amen.