

## Mark10.35-45

James and John remind me of children who ask:  
“Dad, will you do anything we ask you?”  
If you say “Yes”  
then they either ask for a million pounds  
or invite you to draw a square circle.  
Jesus, like a wise Father, invites them  
to tell him what they want, without making any promises.

The request is almost unbelievable.  
Jesus has just told his disciples for a third time  
that they are on their way to Jerusalem  
where he will be put to death  
by those who exercise authority.  
Yet, they seem still to have in their minds  
that when Jesus reaches Jerusalem he will start a revolution  
which will see him seated in glory as the new leader of the people.  
(There is, of course, an irony  
that Mark’s readers will appreciate!  
He is going to Jerusalem to be proclaimed “King”  
but his authority will come through his death  
and God’s act of resurrection.)

In Matthew’s Gospel, the writer says it was their mother  
who made the request that they should have  
the two chief positions of authority under him.  
No doubt this was to deflect the crassness  
of the request made by these two apostles.  
Yet, the very fact that Mark names them suggests  
that this is an authentic memory.  
Interestingly, the anger of the other ten  
is not because James and John have made a foolish request  
but because they fear these two have stolen a march on them.  
Why hadn’t they asked Jesus first!

Jesus has much to say.  
First, he reminds them that being a disciple  
is always going to be a life  
in which we share in drinking his cup of suffering  
and are baptised with the waters difficulty and trouble.  
Christians who expect that following Jesus  
will lead to an easy life are going to be disappointed!

Secondly, the pattern of leadership in the church  
is given to us by Jesus himself.  
***“The Son of Man came not be served but to serve...”***

Christian leadership is not about lording it over others  
but about self-giving in love and care.

This applies not only to priests and ministers  
but to all those who speak and act in the name of Christ.  
It applies both within the life of the gathered church  
and when we live out our lives in the world.

Jesus shows that service is not a matter of being weak  
or of doing whatever someone asks us.  
It is always about loving others,  
desiring their good,  
being prepared to give of ourselves to help those  
who have no human claim upon us.

Thirdly, Jesus says that the life of service  
finds its fulfilment in his own self-giving  
as a “ransom for many”.  
When he says “for many”  
he’s not suggesting that some are excluded.  
It’s a way of saying that he gives his life  
for the rest of humanity.  
His death will confer a real benefit on humanity  
even though he doesn’t spell out precisely what that will be.

Of course, Christians have rightly wanted to speak of the benefits  
that we have receive through the death of Jesus.

Here are three of them:

1. His death powerfully reveals  
the height and depth of God’s love for us.  
He gives his life out of love for us all.
2. His death has the power to make us see  
the truth about our own blindness and failure.  
Like the first disciples and like many in that age  
we recognise our own need.
3. The outstretched arms welcome us back  
into fellowship with God  
not because we are good or deserving  
but because he loves us and desires only our good!

Our communion is a celebration of all Christ has won for us  
through his self-giving and through his presence with us now. Amen.